

First Sunday of Advent

Year C



FIRST READING
Jeremiah 33:14–16

PSALM
Psalm 25:4–5, 8–10, 14

SECOND READING
1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

GOSPEL
Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

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PRAYER

Psalm 25:4–5, 8–10, 14

Make me to know your ways,
O LORD;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth,
and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners
in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
All the paths of the LORD
are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant
and his decrees.
The friendship of the LORD
is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant
known to them.

READING THE WORD

First Reading
Jeremiah 33:14–16

The days are surely coming, says

the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Second Reading
1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave

you through the Lord Jesus.

Gospel
Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

Jesus said, “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

HEARING THE WORD

“Coming in Majesty”

Today, with the celebration of the First Sunday of Advent, the Church begins Liturgical Year “C”. All four Sundays of Advent offer helpful instruction and admonition meant to prepare the faithful for an encounter with Christ during the Christmas season and far beyond. Today’s liturgy emphasises the certainty of the coming of the Lord in majesty, at an unexpected time. It also provides valuable suggestions on how to prepare for this encounter.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah speaks about a prosperous and bright future for the people of Israel. Jeremiah lived and prophesied during a very troubled historical period, shortly before, and during, the destruction of his country Judah, and of Jerusalem and its Temple. The book of Jeremiah contains a great number of frightening passages, speaking about death, destruction, and exile. Equally frequent is Jeremiah’s condemnation of the Israelite leaders, particularly the kings, whose disastrous rule led to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the scattering of the people.

However, the prophet interweaves his prophecies of doom with oracles of hope. Today’s text is full of hope. Jeremiah visualizes the emergence of a “righteous branch” which will spring up from David. David was the founder of a

royal dynasty whose members had ruled Judah for three centuries. Since their leadership ended in utter failure, the prophet anticipates that God will raise a new leader, a king with Davidic roots, who will restore the nation, and rule his people in justice and righteousness. This future king is described as a “righteous branch”, bearing the name “the Lord is our Righteousness”. The image of a “branch” was used by the prophets to describe a God-sent leader and savior, the Messiah (cf. Zech 3:8). This new leader’s focus will be righteousness. This implies that he will lead the people to a life of righteousness, so that they can be restored, and enjoy God’s favour and protection again. Thus, Jeremiah’s new ruler will be more than a leader and restorer of a destroyed community, he will be its savior.

The first letter to the Thessalonians is the first known letter that Paul wrote to a community he had founded. It is also the earliest writing in the New Testament. Paul evangelized Thessalonica at the very beginning of his missionary career. But it was a difficult beginning. After preaching in the Jewish Synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths, which means only three weeks (Acts 17:1), he had to flee the city due to violent opposition to his message. In this short time, he had succeeded in converting many of his fellow Jews, as well as some Greeks, to the new faith. However, this new community was poorly instructed,

and had many question and doubts. To form their faith further, Paul wrote them at least two letters, and visited the city of Thessalonica on several occasions.

The most important concern Paul addressed in 1 Thessalonians, was the question of the fate of those believers who had died, and the fate of those believers who would in the future, die before the coming of Christ – would they meet Christ and share his glory when he returns? Paul answers this question in 1 Thess 4:13-18.

In today’s reading, Paul looks at the life of his Christians before the return of the Lord, which is called the Parousia. For Paul, the Parousia is central to faith because this will be the moment when, upon his return to earth, the Risen Lord will share the gift of eternal life with believers, regardless of whether they are alive at that time, or had died earlier. Paul insists that believers must prepare for this great event by pursuing holiness and living blamelessly. Holiness can be achieved by living in mutual love, and faithfully following his apostolic teaching, which he would continue to deliver in various forms. The apostle expects his Christians, very young in the faith, to keep the return of the Lord firmly in mind, and allow this perspective to shape and direct them as they continue their journey of faith.

The Gospel reading also focuses on the Parousia, described as the coming

of the Son of Man. In Luke's Gospel, this text forms a part of the eschatological discourse of Jesus (21:5-38). "Eschatology" refers to the study and reflection on the events that will mark the end of time and history. However, this end will be, in fact, a new beginning, when God will transform the entire universe. This transformation will begin with the return of God's Son to earth. According to Luke, the arrival of Jesus, in the appearance of "the Son of Man", will be preceded by cataclysmic events, and "signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars". Understandably, people will be terrified and "faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world." However, Luke emphasizes that the followers of Christ need not fear, because these terrifying events, in reality, indicate that their redemption is at hand.

Jesus cautions his disciples to be on guard because they do not know the day or the time when the Son of Man will come. They must be vigilant, to avoid being taken by surprise by this great event. Vigilance means not allowing oneself to be so absorbed in the pleasures and worries of this life, as to lose the sight of Jesus' return. Prayer is necessary to stay alert in the midst of life's concerns, and to have the strength required to face fears and challenges. Jesus, like Paul after him, urged his disciples to live with a clear awareness of his return, and to prepare for it by a life of watchful discipline.

At the start of the new Litur-

gical year, and of the Advent season, the liturgy lays the foundations for the journey ahead. First, all three readings look far into the future, anticipating the arrival of a new leader through whom God will act for the restoration and salvation of his people. For Jeremiah, this person was to be a Davidic king, who would lead his people to righteousness. Paul wrote to his newly converted Thessalonians having the Parousia of Jesus firmly in view, and the prospect of being raised to a new life and united with the Risen Lord. Luke had the same perspective on life, telling his community that at the end of time Jesus will return as the Son of Man with redemption for his disciples. This perspective, of Jesus' return, led both Jesus and Paul to instruct believers on how to wait for the Son of Man's coming. They are to be vigilant and to expect their Risen Lord, while living a life of moral integrity, mutual love and faithfulness to Christian teaching. This expectation ought to orient and direct every believer in their journey of faith. This journey begins anew with the start of Advent, accompanied by the prayer of the psalmist, "lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation."

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

An expectant mother prepares for the arrival of her baby; a spouse prepares for their husband's or wife's return from a journey; a

student prepares for an impending exam. Almost every important event in our lives is preceded by a period of expectation and preparation. The coming of Christ in majesty is a very important event in the life of Christians. Consequently, the Church sets aside the period of Advent to aid us in our preparation for his arrival.

The word "Advent" comes from a Latin word which means "coming". It is a joyful period of fervent expectation and careful preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. The prophecy of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 33:14-16) is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ who comes with power (cf. Lk. 21:25-28).

The season of Advent affords us the opportunity to prepare, to commemorate and to celebrate the birthday of Christ at his first coming. The taste of an approaching Christmas for many comes as the scent of wine, cake and fried chicken. However, for us Christians, the period of Advent always comes with a true fragrance of the approaching Saviour. We get ready to commemorate his coming into this world by conscious and careful preparation aimed at being ready to welcome him into our lives yet again.

There is also another dimension to our Advent vigil - we are reminded that our life is ultimately one great Advent as we wait to encounter Christ at his second coming, when he will return to judge the living and the dead.

In view of this perspective of Christ's arrival, today's readings issue a clear call to holiness in anticipation of the coming of Christ in majesty. In the context of this call, there are three considerations which should guide our preparations during this season.

First - repentance. During this period, we are called to turn away from sin and be reconciled to the Lord. Paul encourages us to be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus (1 Thess 3:13). Herein lies the importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Second - prayer. Advent is a season of fervent prayer, both personal and communal. We are encouraged to pray that we may have the strength to persevere in our faith in the midst of the trials, challenges and temptations of life.

Finally - vigilance. The coming of the Lord ought not to catch us like a trap (Luke 21:34-35). To be vigilant is to be constantly ready. The best way to achieve such a state of constant readiness is simply to practice holiness expressed through love every day of life. No great miracles or extraordinary deeds are required of us, only faith manifested through love.

There is an Ashanti proverb which says, "the beating of drums precedes the coming of a chief." In the same way, the Church's liturgical celebration of Advent is a resounding call announcing

that Jesus, the King of kings is coming. There is "time for everything"; now is the time to prepare to meet the Lord.

PROVERB

*“The
beating
of drums
precedes
the coming
of a chief.”*

ACTION

Self-examination:

If my life should end today and I find myself standing in eternity, would I be able to look into the eyes of the Lord with confidence or cringe away in fear?

Am I aware that my daily dealings with people are an essential part of preparation for the Lord's coming? If not, how can I change that?

Response to God:

In a moment of prayerful silence, I call to mind some of most important scenes from my life throughout the year. Where I have acted in love, I give thanks to God. Where I have acted selfishly, I seek pardon from the Lord. Invited by the Lord, I choose to respond to his call to repentance by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Response to your World:

I will put a miniature Advent wreath in a suitable place at home as an efficacious reminder to myself and members of my family of the season of Advent we are observing.

Within our group, we share and come up with some concrete ways of preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus,
keep me fervent in faith
and good works
as I await your coming.
Guide and strengthen me
so that
all who I come in contact with
may be inspired
to seek your presence
in their lives,
and be ready
to welcome you whenever
and however you come.
Amen.*