

1st Sunday of Advent, Year B

Come, Lord Jesus. Give me the grace to make this day fit for You to see and may I be ready at any moment to meet You face to face.

Here we start a new liturgical year with a time of repentance and joyful expectation!

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

This section is a prayer that was probably composed toward the end of the exile. The prophet recalls God's blessings on Israel, especially at the Exodus, and begs the Lord to come once more to the aid of his people who now humbly confess their sins. It is a prayer for God's mercy, a plea that God will remember his wondrous deeds of old and renew them again.

16b You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. This reading, which is addressed to God, reminds him that He is their father (by both creation and redemption) and their redeemer, (which refers to the saving action of Yahweh who imparted a life that shared his love and hope to the people, a life far more precious than physical life.)

17 Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage. When we wander from the Lord's ways, our hearts become "hardened" or stubborn and unwilling to learn and to serve and to be obedient. This verse is written in the language of the covenant.

19b Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down with the mountains quaking before you, Both this verse and the next one express a wish that God would take the initiative and "tear open" the heavens and come again in power and majesty to redeem the people. (This could just as well be our "wish" today!) This prayer was fulfilled when the heavens were opened at the baptism of Jesus and the messianic era began.

2 while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, 3 such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Advent reminds us that we are "WAITING" for the Lord to come again.

4 Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; Read this: "At the hour of our death, would that you might meet us doing what pleases you." This puts us in mind of St. Francis, "If you knew that you were to die tomorrow, what would you do?" If there is something that you would change, **DON'T TAKE A CHANCE—CHANGE IT!**

5 all of us have become unclean men, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. This is a confession of the sinfulness of the people. The "polluted rags" are cloths used during menstruation. All have "withered like leaves" is the opposite of Ps.1:3 where the just person is compared to a tree whose "leaves never fade."

6 There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. The people don't call upon God's name because they don't even remember to do so!

7 Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands. "YET": we can read this as "IN SPITE OF ALL OF OUR SINS" God is still our father and he can still re-form us and mold us into a people that will please him.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

This letter, which was written by Paul in about 57 AD to the people of Corinth, is in response to the upsetting news that, among other things, the people were dividing into groups that identified themselves with Paul or Apollos or Peter or others.

Brothers and sisters:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the conclusion of the greeting. Friendship with God brings grace and peace of soul, which was described by St. Augustine as “serenity of mind, tranquility of soul, simplicity of heart, a bond of love and the union of charity.”

4 I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, “Nothing charms God more than a heart that is grateful either on its own account or on account of others.” This insight is from St. John Chrysostom who lived at the end of the 4th century.

5 that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, This means that the people had such a good grasp of Christian teaching that they were able to express it clearly.

6 as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you,

7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul commends the community. The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. There are also charismatic gifts and the point that Paul is making is that whatever they need as a church body, God will provide and he will go on providing until the Second Coming. In addition to Love, each of us has gifts for the good of all. (What spiritual gift do you desire? How would you like to serve?)

8 He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this verse he reminds the people of their expectation of Christ’s second coming and he gives them the promise that **GOD WILL STRENGTHEN THEM TO THE DAY OF THEIR JUDGMENT!**

9 God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God will be faithful! We just have to do our part. This is also a reminder that they are called by God (which requires a response) and not just by men. Whoever brings us the Word of God is a messenger of God.

Mark 13:33-37

This week’s gospel is very similar to those of the last three weeks in warning us that Jesus will return and we must watch for him. These words were spoken by Christ on the Tuesday night of Holy Week. Jesus and his disciples had retired from the temple for the last time. On the way out, he foretold the utter destruction that should come upon it. They all went over to the Mount of Olives and sat down where they could see the city. This selection answers the question asked by the apostles in 13:4: “What will be the sign that all this is coming to an end?”

Jesus said to his disciples:

33 “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. This watchfulness, this alertness, this vigilance is above all, LOVE. When a person loves, he keeps the commandments and looks forward to Christ’s return. His whole life is then a period of hoping and waiting and serving and preparing to meet the KING.

³⁴It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. The gospel of Mark emphasizes the watchfulness of those in charge like the gatekeeper in this reading. He points out that they have a particular duty to help all maintain a state of readiness. It certainly reminds us of Ezekiel 33 where we read of the “watchman” who, when he sees the sword coming against the country, blows the trumpet to warn the people. He goes on to say that those who do not heed the warning are responsible for their own death but if the WATCHMAN FAILS to blow the trumpet in warning, he is responsible for the death of each of those slain even though they are taken because of their own sin. This parable refers to the responsibilities of the Church before the Second Coming. The “man” is Christ in his human nature, who traveled into the far country of heaven at his Ascension. The “servants” are his followers who, filled with the Holy Spirit, are enabled to fulfill their duties in his absence. The pastors of the Church are the “gatekeepers” who are to guard against the intrusion of the devil until Christ’s glorious return.

³⁵Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. These are the four watches of the night. They each last three hours between 6:00 PM and 6:AM. It has also been suggested that these watches may conveniently represent the four principal periods of life: childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. The command to be watchful operates on three levels: 1. The earliest Christians, still worshipping in the Jerusalem Temple, must be prepared to flee the city before its downfall. 2. Everyone must be ready for his personal judgment by God and 3. the Church must persevere in holiness while awaiting Jesus’ Second Coming at the end of time.

³⁶May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. The “sleeping” of the servants refers to the neglect of spiritual duties first on the part of pastors and then on the part of every Christian.

³⁷What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’ “To live, grow, and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must BEG the Lord to increase our faith, it must be working through charity, abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church.” CCC162.

Some of the material for this study was taken from “The Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers: 1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” The Saint Joseph Edition of “The New American Bible,” The Navarre Bible: “St. Mark,” and “Corinthians,” “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” “The Gospel of Mark” by William Barclay, and The Parables of Christ” by Charles J. Callan.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.