

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

Introduction

"The first coming of Christ the Lord... was in obscurity; the second will be in the sight of the whole world. When he came in obscurity no one recognized him but his own servants; when he comes openly he will be known by both good people and bad. When he came in obscurity, it was to be judged; when he comes openly it will be to judge". (Augustine, Sermon 18.1; trans. E. Barnecut, p. 10)

"When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming". (CCC 524)

Question - In the Creed, we profess that "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." What are some practical ways to "keep awake" and be ready for the Second Coming of Christ? And why should we prepare if the final Advent does not happen in our lifetimes? ~ Brant Pitre

Reading 1 - Isaiah 63:16-19, 64:2-7

- 16 For you are our father,
 though Abraham does not know us
 and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O Lord, are our father;
 our Redeemer from of old is your name.
- 17 Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways
 and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?
Turn back for the sake of your servants,
 for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.
- 18 Your holy people took possession for a little while;
 but now our adversaries have trampled down your sanctuary.
- 19 We have long been like those whom you do not rule,
 like those not called by your name.
- 2 as when fire kindles brushwood
 and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your adversaries,
 so that the nations might tremble at your presence!
- 3 When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
 you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
- 4 From ages past no one has heard,
 no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
 who works for those who wait for him.
- 5 You meet those who gladly do right,
 those who remember you in your ways.

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

- But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.
- 6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
- 7 There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

This is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures where a prayer is explicitly addressed to God as Father. Isaiah is tugging on the heartstrings of God by calling him, Father. Jesus uses this "Our Father" from Isaiah.

The sacred writer is defending his status as an authentic Israelite and true child of God (Exodus 4:22). God became Israel's father not by creating the people but by redeeming them. Redemption imparted a life that shared God's love and hopes, a life far more precious than any physical life.

The prophet Isaiah - in the context of Israel's suffering, the exile and the scattering of the tribes of the people amongst the Gentile nations - makes a prayer for God himself to come down from heaven and save His people. This anticipates the mystery of the Incarnation.

Psalm - Psalm 80:2-19

- 2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
- 3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
- 4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
- 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
- 6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
- 7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

- 8 You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
- 9 You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
- 10 The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
- 11 it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.
- 12 Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
- 13 The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.
- 14 Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted.
- 15 They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
- 16 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
- 17 Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
- 18
- 19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

The Psalm for today bridges the gap between the old and the new. It's a prayer for salvation. It's a prayer for God to come and save us.

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

Reading 2 - 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶ just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The busy port of Corinth had a lively and turbulent Christian community. Their first surviving letter from Saint Paul treats difficulties in the community reported to St. Paul (probably at Ephesus in A.D. 57) by their envoys, then answers various questions they brought to him. Today we hear the Greeting and Thanksgiving portion of Saint Paul's opening remarks.

This is Saint Paul's customary salutation. It signifies the gracious goodness of God and the gifts that are the effect of the divine liberality. Grace is the favor God shows and the gift He gives to men whom He saves in Christ. Peace is the fruit of the salvation God gives in Christ. It includes the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God as well as harmony among men. Perfect peace will be realized only at the parousia, when Christ's redemptive work is completed. The Corinthians enjoy grace and peace because they are brothers of Jesus the Christ, children of His Father.

⁵ that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, All the charismatic gifts of speech: discourse of wisdom, discourse of knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8) as well as the gift of tongues, of interpretation, of teaching, of making known a revelation, even of singing a psalm (1 Corinthians 14:26).

"Revelation" = *Apokalypsis* means unveiling or revelation in Greek, but is also the word from which we get the English apocalypse, like the book of Revelation is sometimes called the Apocalypse. In Greek the title of Revelation is *Apokalypsis*, so the Church chooses this passage from 1 Corinthians because Paul mentions in it the *apokalypsis* or the revelation of Jesus at the end of time. So it's another way of talking about his parousia, about his second coming, about his final advent at the end of time

The Corinthians are adequately equipped with spiritual gifts. The Corinthians tended to focus on the excitement of the present, so Saint Paul has to remind them that completeness is reserved to the future.

The parousia of Christ "Although we lack no gift, nevertheless we await the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will then keep us secure in all things and present us unimpeachable when the day of our Lord Jesus Christ comes. The end of the world shall arrive, when no flesh may glory in His sight." [Saint Jerome (A.D. 415), Dialogue Against the Pelagians 2,8]

If believers are to receive a favorable eschatological judgment, it is due to God's assistance. The Christian adaptation of the Day of Yahweh (Amos 5:18). "Paul is confident that the Corinthians

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

will persevere in righteousness during the day of judgment. People who could not be shaken in spite of so many turmoils and disagreements proved that they would remain faithful to the end. In praising them, Paul is also challenging those who had been corrupted by the errors of the false apostles, for in proclaiming the faith of the former, he is calling the latter to repentance.” [The Ambrosiaster (ca. 366-384), Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles, 1 Corinthians 1,4]

God will not abandon what He has begun. Members of the Church are frequently referred to as “the called ones” (1 Corinthians 2:2, 24; Romans 1:6, 7; 8:28). Communion. The Greek word translated here is *koinonia* which means the vital union of believers among themselves, their union with Christ. Their shared existence as members of His body. This *koinonia* is highlighted in the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Gospel - Mark 13:33-37

³³ Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Since Advent is a time of preparing for the second Advent (the second coming of Christ), the Church gives us this passage from the Olivet discourse, where Jesus, right before his passion begins, talks about the future.

This context of this Gospel reading is Jesus' prophecies about the *parousia*, in Greek, or *adventus*, in Latin (the Latin translation of this text actually has *adventus* = one reason the Church gave us this text). Prophecies about his final coming.

Mark's gospel is the most compact of all the gospels, concentrating not on Jesus' teaching but on the mystery of His person, the gradual way in which the disciples reach an understanding of Him which still remains hidden from the crowds. The paradox is that Jesus is acknowledged as Son of God by the Father and by evil spirits, and yet He is rejected by the leaders of the Jews and is even misunderstood by His own disciples. As we celebrate a new liturgical year, we look forward to the arrival of our Lord. As we await the Lord's coming, He warns us to always be on the alert.

Jesus' last words to his disciples, and in a sense to all of us, is watch or keep awake.

So the language here of watch literally in Greek is *grēgoreōso* and it means to keep alert or to stay awake. In other words, to be vigilant.

Commentaries
1st Sunday of Advent: Year B

This exhortation to Christian vigilance is true for all ages. Jesus brings this point out with a parable.

“A person does not go wrong when he knows that he does not know something, but only when he thinks he knows something which he does not know.” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (ca. A.D. 400), Letter to Hesychius 52]

"What keeps us alert and watchful? *Desire*. The final words of the Bible express the summation of human longing: “The Spirit and the bride say come!” Great saints like Augustine, Gregory and Bernard all tell us that Christ keeps his bride waiting to increase and *stretch her desire*. Desire is the faculty that not only pines after the divine gift, but also receives it when it is given, so the wider our desire, the more we are capable of receiving. Christ wants us to be as wide open to his gift as possible, stretched in our desire unto infinity, because that’s what he has to offer us: the wild ecstasy of Infinite bliss in union with him. Come Lord Jesus, come!" ~ Christopher West

In the ancient world, you could be delayed months or even years in your journey to a destination. Paul gives witness to this in Acts.

Jesus does not set a deadline or a date for the end of the world. He tells the disciples over and over again that you do not know the day or the hour, you don't know the time when the Son of Man is going to come.

Four divisions of the night (into periods of three hours each) were used by the Romans. Jewish Palestinian usage divided it into three watches (as illustrated by the parallel story in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 12:38).

There would be different hours that people would trade off to watch and guard at night, whether it would be evening (like at sunset), or midnight (the middle of the night), cockcrow (which would be early morning but not yet daylight), or the morning itself (dawn). Any one of those hours he might come back and you need to be ready. Although notice that it does suggest that he comes back when? At night. The idea is that he comes at an unexpected time, one that we won't necessarily be ready for, one that we might be inclined to be asleep for. So his exhortation to the disciples is you need to stay awake, “lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.”

These final words are evocative because they are repeated in Jesus' passion that follows.

This statement lifts the whole discourse beyond the limits of the narrow perspective of the crisis that the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple would mean to the Jews and Jewish Christians. “Watch therefore, and pray, that you do not sleep unto death (see Luke 21:36). For your former good deeds will not profit you if in the end of your life you go astray from the true faith.” [(ca. A.D.400), Apostolic Constitutions, 7,2,31]