

Weekend Readings & Reflections

November 27-28, 2021 – First Sunday of Advent

Reflection: Every Advent, the Liturgy of the Word gives our sense of time a reorientation. There's a deliberate tension in the next four weeks' readings—between promise and fulfillment, expectation and deliverance, between looking forward and looking back. In today's First Reading, the prophet Jeremiah focuses our gaze on the promise God made to David, some 1,000 years before Christ. God says through the prophet that He will fulfill this promise by raising up a “just shoot,” a righteous offspring of David, who will rule Israel in justice (see [2 Samuel 7:16](#); [Jeremiah 33:17](#); [Psalm 89:4–5](#); [27–38](#)). Today's Psalm, too, sounds the theme of Israel's ancient expectation: “Guide me in your truth and teach me. For you are God my savior and for you I will wait all day.” We look back on Israel's desire and anticipation knowing that God has already made good on those promises by sending His Only Son into the world. Jesus is the “just shoot,” the God and Savior for Whom Israel was waiting. Knowing that He is a God who keeps His promises lends grave urgency to the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. Urging us to keep watch for His return in glory, He draws on Old Testament images of chaos and instability—turmoil in the heavens (see [Isaiah 13:11, 13](#); [Ezekiel 32:7–8](#); [Joel 2:10](#)); roaring seas (see [Isaiah 5:30](#); [17:12](#)); distress among the nations (see [Isaiah 8:22](#); [14:25](#)) and terrified people (see [Isaiah 13:6–11](#)). He evokes the prophet Daniel's image of the Son of Man coming on a cloud of glory to describe His return as a “theophany,” a manifestation of God (see [Daniel 7:13–14](#)). Many will cower and be literally scared to death. But Jesus says we should greet the end-times with heads raised high, confident that God keeps His promises, that our “redemption is at hand,” that “the kingdom of God is near” (see [Luke 21:31](#)).

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the first Sunday of Advent, a time of preparation. let us pray in the words our Savior gave us:

All: Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Amen. —The Advent Prayer by Henri Nouwen

Leader: Even though Advent is supposed to be a time of hope and new beginnings, it is often one of the most stressful times of the year. We feel pressure to make the holidays “perfect,” and we can get caught up in the frantic pace of errands and shopping. However, the readings for this first Sunday are intended to get us to stop and think about what's really important. What are some ways that you might resist the cultural temptations to “do more” and instead focus more on “being present to the Lord” during these weeks? On this First Sunday of Advent, let us look at the message the readings have for us today. As we watch and listen to today's video, reflect on the question from above and how you might apply Jesus' words to your own life and how you respond when things get difficult or stressful. Consider what you feel when you think about the Son of Man coming again.

The Coming of God's Son

“The coming of God's Son to earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He makes everything converge on Christ: all the rituals and sacrifices, figures and symbols of the “First Covenant.” He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel. Moreover, he awakens in the hearts of the pagans a dim expectation of this coming.” —CCC 522

FIRST READING ~ Jeremiah 33:14-16 ~

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The LORD our justice."

Advent begins today. The color purple has an interesting background for us to ponder. Purple dye historically originated from a tiny shell-fish. It took 12,000 shell fish to make 1.5 grams of pure dye. The expense meant it was used only by the wealthy and became a symbol of royalty. Advent purple indicates we are waiting for the coming of the King of Kings. We are preparing for the birth of Jesus but also spiritually for the second coming.

- Ponder for a few minutes what you would do if in 4 weeks' time you were truly going to stand before Jesus Christ the King.

Jeremiah was a prophet in a very difficult time. Jewish King after Jewish King had failed to bring peace. God's people were now in exile in Babylon. In the midst of foreign people and their gods Jewish people began to lose hope. Jeremiah reminds them of a promise made by God to believe in: I will raise up a just shoot from the line of David. So beautiful will this event be, the great city of Jerusalem will be renamed - Justice!

- In the midst of life's difficulties what brings you hope? Frequently we think of God's love, but do we recognize what God really wants is justice. Do you hope for this as a future event or do you give your life to its fulfillment today?

SECOND READING ~ 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 ~

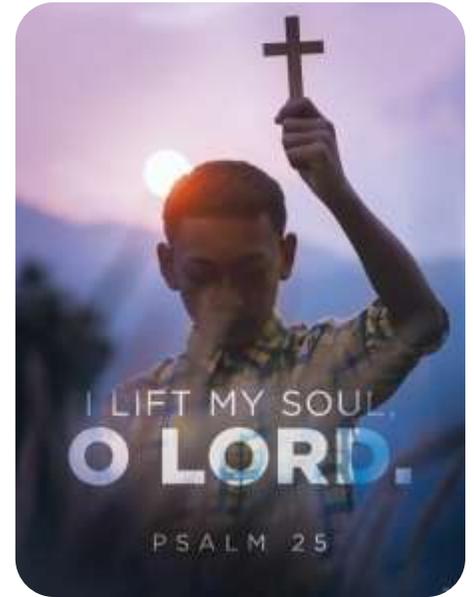
Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen. Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God and as you are conducting yourselves you do so even more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Thessalonica was one of the earliest Christian communities. A port city bringing trade and culture, hot springs bringing tourists. It was prime real estate in a Roman provincial town. With many cultures came many gods, Greek, Egyptian, Roman Emperor worship. Paul had been chased out of this town quickly but had established a small group of Christian followers. He writes to encourage them to be blameless in holiness, living lives pleasing to God. Ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.

- Picture your own town instead of Thessalonica. What is the purpose of conducting yourselves to please God? Is it only for heaven or a sign for people today of heaven?

GOSPEL ~ Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 ~

Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming



in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."

Year C begins with our move from the Gospel of Mark to the Gospel of Luke. Luke's community is tired of waiting on a promise of Christ's return. Luke gives instruction on how Christians are to live while waiting.

- *What does the image: 'stand erect and raise your head' mean to you? What would make you do this? What does living in readiness now actually look like for you?*

Luke contrasts people of the world with hearts drowsy or hardened with excessive sensual pleasure, drunkenness, worries, with Christian disciples watchful and vigilant, praying and ready to stand before the Son of Man.

- *Where are you in this picture? What advent practices could you begin to be vigilant, prayerful, ready?*
- *What would you like to bring to God in the Advent practice of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation?*

We all know what December will involve: shopping, cooking, socializing, end of year celebrations.

- *Will you be satisfied? How could you slow down and set aside time to soak up the Christian focus of Christmas - is there a church near or on the journey from work you could visit for 5 minutes daily?*

MEDITATION

How good are you at reading signs, especially signs which God sends our way? The people of Jesus' time expected that the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by extraordinary signs and wonders. Jesus' first coming was clouded in mystery and surprising wonderment: Even though he was the rightful heir to the throne of King David, he was born in obscurity in a cave at Bethlehem, near the place where David had watched over his father's sheep some 1000 years before. A choir of mighty angels chose to announce the good news to a small band of lowly shepherds keeping their night watch nearby. Learned magi from the East, who recognized a great omen in the heavenly sky, followed the star until it led them to Bethlehem. They alone found the child with his mother and paid him homage as the newborn king of Israel. When Jesus humbly submitted to baptism at the River Jordan, the heavenly Father spoke audibly for those nearby who were willing to listen, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus told his disciples that his final great sign would be his return in glory at the end of the age. He would come this second time as Judge and Merciful Redeemer to vindicate those who accepted him as Lord and Savior and to punish those who rejected him. Jesus declared that this last sign at the end of the world would be unmistakable. All would recognize and "see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). The title which Jesus most often used to describe his Messianic role was the expression "Son of Man". This title comes from the Book of the prophet Daniel, chapter 7. The image of a "Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" was given in a vision where the prophet Daniel saw heaven opened before the

throne of God (Daniel 7:13-14). In this vision God showed Daniel a royal investiture of a human king before God's throne. This king was invested with God's authority and was given power to judge and rule over the whole earth. His reign would last for all ages. What can keep us from recognizing the signs of the Lord's presence and his action today? Indifference and the temptation to slacken off - to become passive and lethargic or to fall asleep spiritually. It is very easy to get caught up in the things of the present moment or to be weighed down with troubles. The Lord knows our shortcomings and struggles and he gives us the strength to bear our burdens and to walk in his way of holiness. But there is one thing he doesn't tolerate: an attitude of luke- warmness, indifference, being passive, not caring, and doing nothing when we could be actively seeking God and his kingdom! God is ready to give us fresh vision, hope, and grace to walk in his ways. He wants to work in and through us for his glory. That is why he expects more of us than we can do by ourselves. His grace enables us to actively watch for his action in our lives, and to actively pray for perseverance and endurance when we face trials and difficulties. The Lord gives us his strength to overcome temptation, especially from apostasy - the denial of the Lord Jesus out of fear or pride. God is ever ready to fill us with his strength and divine power. Is your heart hungry for God or is it weighed down by other things? The Advent season which precedes Christmas and Epiphany reminds us that we are a pilgrim people, aliens and exiles in this age who long for our true home with God in his heavenly kingdom, and who await with joyful hope the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age. When will the Lord Jesus come again? No one but the Father in heaven knows the day. But it is a certain fact that we are living in the end times, the close of this present age! The end times begin with the first coming of Jesus Christ (his Incarnation which we celebrate at Christmas and Epiphany) and culminates in his final return on the Day of Judgment.

- *What are you doing to prepare for the season of Advent and Christmas? For the Second Coming? What things need to change in order to open up your heart to allow Christ to enter this Christmas?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray that we may slow down and enjoy the time God has given us. Let us not lose focus on what is most important...

ALL: Lord Jesus, may I never lose sight of the signs of your presence in my life and the signs of your action in the world today. Free me from spiritual dullness, indifference, and every distraction that would keep me from you. May I never tire of listening to your word, seeking you in prayer, and longing for your return in glory. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlaitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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