



# LIVING THE GOSPEL

**First Sunday of Advent  
December 1<sup>st</sup> 2024**

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**Theme: "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars."**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming, so that, gathered at his right hand, they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

Jesus said to his disciples, <sup>25</sup> "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, <sup>26</sup> men fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. <sup>34</sup> "But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; <sup>35</sup> for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

## **Gospel Focus**

Many of us think of Advent as a peacefully prayerful time. The idea of "keeping vigil" is appealing and cozy: shortened days draw us inside, where light dim and candles flicker while we renew our devotion to prayer. However, the first Sunday of Advent always has an edge to it. Jesus' reminders to stay vigilant are not gentle ones. He warns that his return to earth will assault everyone who lives here. People are going to die of fright at the cosmic signs of the eschaton. Jesus' return will be a source of great joy, but it is also going to change the world, as we know it. No matter how well we purify our desires, all of us will suffer some loss in the process. Jesus calls us to this vigilance: detachment from the things of this world so that we will be ready to leave them behind when the time comes.

## **Gospel Reflection**

How do people who fall in love sustain their hopeful expectation of one another throughout their lives? Some relationships begin to crumble after the infatuation wears off, the delight in mutual commitment fades, and routine life settles in. Some relationships don't make it through a lifetime. Others weather the passage of time with moments of renewed celebration of promises made and kept, and crises faced together, strengthening the lifelong bond. Such experiences in human relationships reveal something of how God interacts with us.

As Advent begins, people in the northern hemisphere may be inclined to snuggle into the shortened dark days of approaching winter to calmly contemplate the coming of Christ. But the readings put us in a crisis mode that mode that is anything but restful. Jeremiah addresses the exiles who are undergoing great distress. He had earlier prophesied that the Davidic dynasty will be restored soon after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, the weary exiles have experiences disaster after disaster, and they are grasping for some sign of hope. "The days are coming" is an expression that, in the Bible, ordinarily introduces a pronouncement of judgment, instilling fear in the hearers. Instead, Jeremiah uses the phrase to startle the careworn exiles with an assurance that God will fulfill the promises made Israel and Judah.

While Jeremiah's hearers were waiting for fulfillment of God's promises in an existing crisis, Luke and Paul's hearers are waiting for an apocalyptic end time that seems long in coming. Luke's warning is not to let one's heart go drowsy during the long wait. Like lovers whose passion fades and whose lives are lulled into routine, the people's ardor may dim, and they may be found unprepared for the coming crisis. Luke advises not letting our hearts go after things satisfy only for a time and not becoming weighed down with anxiety. Be always watchful, he says, so as not to be taken by surprise. Pray for strength, and do not be afraid. Stand tall, he says, raise your heads, and be ready for the embrace of the one who is Love incarnate.

Paul tells the Thessalonians to strengthen their hearts. He prays, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love with one another and for all," reminding us that it is a God who initiates and sustains us in love and that it is love meant to be shared with all. Daily prayer and daily outreach prepare us well for the crisis times, when disaster strikes, when jobs are lost, when illness or death turns our world awry, when violence rips at the fabric of our world. With hearts already strengthened by God's love, we are able to withstand any assault.

The expectations of the birth of a child can often reignite the ardor of a flagging love relationship. So too in Advent, if our hearts are weary or drowsy, our preparation for the celebration of the Christ, who has already been born as one of us, can spark our love once again, not only toward the One who came as a child in our midst but also to all God's beloved children.

## **Old/New Testament and CCC links**

### **First Reading — Jer 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."

## **Responsorial Reading — Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14**

***R: To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.***

Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths,  
guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior,  
and for you I wait all the day. **(R)**

Good and upright is the Lord; thus he shows sinners the way.  
He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way. **(R)**

All the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees. The friendship of the Lord is with those who fear him, and his covenant, for their instruction. **(R)**

## **Second Reading — 1 Thess 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.

## **Catechism of The Catholic Church**

**671.** Though already present in his Church, Christ's reign is nevertheless yet to be fulfilled "with power and great glory" by the King's return to earth.<sup>557</sup> This reign is still under attack by the evil powers, even though they have been defeated definitively by Christ's Passover.<sup>557</sup> Until everything is subject to him, "until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church, in her sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the sons of God."<sup>559</sup> That is why Christians pray, above all in the Eucharist, to hasten Christ's return by saying to him:<sup>560</sup> *Marana tha!* "Our Lord, come!"<sup>561</sup>

**697.** Cloud and light. These two images occur together in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In the theophanies of the Old Testament, the cloud, now obscure, now luminous, reveals the living and saving God, while veiling the transcendence of his glory - with Moses on Mount Sinai,<sup>43</sup> at the tent of meeting,<sup>44</sup> and during the wandering in the desert,<sup>45</sup> and with Solomon at the dedication of the Temple.<sup>46</sup> In the Holy Spirit, Christ fulfills these figures. The Spirit comes upon the Virgin Mary and "overshadows" her, so that she might conceive and give birth to Jesus.<sup>47</sup> On the mountain of Transfiguration, the Spirit in the "cloud came and overshadowed" Jesus, Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John, and "a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'"<sup>48</sup> Finally, the cloud took Jesus out of the sight of the disciples on the day of his ascension and will reveal him as Son of man in glory on the day of his final coming

**2612.** In Jesus "the Kingdom of God is at hand."<sup>72</sup> He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to *watchfulness*. In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory.<sup>73</sup> In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. What might you need to detach from in order to be better for Jesus' coming?
2. Thinking about your own mortality, how would you live this coming year if you knew it was your last on earth?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** Lord God, guide us always in your truth and teach us. Hear our prayers as we begin this season of preparation for the coming of your Son, and draw us ever closer to you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen.