

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE C

Opening prayer: *Father in heaven, our hearts desire the warmth of your love and our minds are searching for the light of your Word. Increase our longing for Christ our Savior and give us the strength to grow in love, that the dawn of his coming may find us rejoicing in his presence and welcoming the light of his truth. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen*

Sharing of life: What are you most and least grateful for as we begin a new church year?

Facilitator reads focus statement: This Sunday we begin a new liturgical or church year. We begin *Cycle C* readings. Our gospel this year will be Luke. Each year the first Sunday of Advent focuses on the Comings of Jesus. Jeremiah speaks of a "shoot" that will spring up from the house of Israel. The gospel encourages us to be watchful and prayerful as we await his Second Coming. Paul encourages his readers to lead good Christian lives.

Now read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading.

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 33:14-16

This reading seeks to bring comfort and hope to a people living in exile wondering, perhaps, if God had forgotten them. The reading speaks of God's *promise* to raise up a "just shoot" from the house of David - one who will "do what is right and just in the Lord" The early Christians saw in this promise a reference to Jesus of Nazareth, a descendent of the family of King David. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise proclaimed in this reading. Jerusalem, a city whose name means "foundation of peace", is given here a new name, "the Lord our justice". Implied in this is that the city will have peace when justice is done. Recall the famous words of Pope Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 25

In this psalm we ask God to teach us his ways.

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

In this reading we have a "wish prayer" and an exhortation to a community who believed that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. Paul prays that the Thessalonians 'grow in love'; thus becoming ready for the Second Coming or return of Jesus. Then he urges them to "conduct themselves in a way pleasing to God".

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

Chapter 21 in Luke's Gospel speaks about the destruction of the Temple, the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world - all terrifying events.

In these verses, Jesus speaks about the coming of the Son of Man (at the end of the world). Using apocalyptic ("veiled") language, Jesus presents images of both cosmic and political upheaval ("seas and waves roaring", "nations in anguish") to speak about this event. The unrighteous will be terrified by these events, but faithful disciples of Jesus need not fear, for the coming of the Son of Man will signal their deliverance and salvation.

Then Jesus exhorts his followers to "be on guard," lest they fall into self-indulgence and forget God and his ways. There will be a day of reckoning for *all* people. The Gospel ends with an exhortation to "watch" and "pray". Such "watching" and "praying" will view all that they *say* and *do* in the context of the Gospel. In other words, "What would Jesus say or do in this situation?" For the faithful disciple, the coming of the Son of Man will not be a fearful event. Rather, it will be a day of triumph and joy.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you? Why?

2. In the first reading, Jeremiah tells us that doing what is 'right and just' will make everyone feel "safe and secure". Do you find this to be true?

3. In the second reading, Paul says; "*May God strengthen your heart.*" Can you recall a time when God "strengthened your heart", thus helping you to cope with a difficult time or event in your life?

4. What helps you keep your focus on Jesus during a season when so much emphasis is on shopping and parties?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Spend time reflecting on your Family Tree. Are there any skeletons or dark secrets in your Tree? If so, consider dealing with them this Advent Season. Pray for the grace to open your heart to a new Advent (Coming) of Jesus into your heart.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Especially pray for the grace to "keep your eyes on Jesus" during this Advent Season. ©