

Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community
FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Cycle B - November 29, 2020



OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord, let us see your face and we shall be saved.*

All: **Lord, hear us. You, from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth. Rouse your power, and come to save us.**

Leader: *Lord, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted.*

All: **May your help be with the man of your right hand, with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.**

Leader: *Let us invoke the presence of God:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit have instructed the hearts of the faithful grant that by the same Spirit we may truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Reading [Isaiah 63 (16-17), (19) and 64 (2-7)]

You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. 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.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, 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.

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; all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; we have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind.

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.

Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.

Toward the end of the book of Isaiah, we find a long confession that shows the people recognizing their sins before God. Sometimes we find ourselves with psalms that present a similar content. It is very rare to find the Israelites in the Old Testament referring to God as "Father". (In fact, this is one of the new concepts presented by Jesus: God is called "Father" 70 times in the gospels as opposed to just 3 times in the Old Testament).

In this reading, the prayers acknowledge their unfaithfulness to God, in spite of the gifts they have received from him, and they ask for help to be better. In the Israelite's experience, they see their infidelity to God as the cause of all their misery. When we suffer from our sins, we experience negative consequences that result from our actions that some people may interpret as "God's punishment". However, we now know that God is not vengeful or one to punish and the suffering we experience comes from results of our sin and not from God.

In spite of everything, the faithful can appeal to the supplication or prayers asking God for forgiveness, as an expression of the firm hope in a liberating action from God. We alone cannot overcome sin without the help of God. The community of believers knows that God is merciful and that he will help us pursue the holiness He expects from us. The faithful appeal to God confident that their repentance will be accepted by the Father and that his immense goodness will shape our sinful natures like clay in the hands of the potter if we open our hearts and invite him in.

- (1) When someone violates a law, and he confesses this to the authorities, what does this person expect to receive?
- (2) When one violates the law of God and comes before one of his ministers and confesses, what does one get?
- (3) There are aspects of our personality that still need refinement as we journey on our path to holiness. Without confessing personal issues before the group, discuss ordinary sins people today struggle with.
- (4) Regarding the answers to the previous question, let's reflect on "formulas" or "remedies" that God makes available to us to help us on the path to holiness.

Second Reading [1 Corinthians 1 (3-9)]

Brothers and sisters:

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

I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This introduction written to the Christian community in Corinth reveals an element of Paul's style of writing: the greeting, which includes a desire that grace and peace be with all. From here we see the greeting that the priests pronounce at the beginning of a Mass. Then the apostle devotes some space to address a prayer of thanks and praise to the Father before delving into the other contents of his letter.

The passage has been chosen for this first Sunday of Advent because it recognizes the fruits that are produced in Christians by God. We note that Jesus Christ is part of the center of Paul's praise because it is through him that we have received these divine gifts. The introduction also serves to exhort the faithful to be firm in this new life that we receive through Christ. Paul adds that the same grace that comes to us from Christ helps us to "remain beyond reproach" in order to prepare for his second coming, the Parousia. This is the spirit that we should cultivate in Advent because it is a period of preparation for something very important that is going to come.

- (1) How often is the focus and motivation of your actions the truth that we are awaiting the Second Coming?
- (2) Do you fear death? What worries you more: your possible suffering, leaving unfinished business, or departing before your loved ones?
- (3) How can we transform these fears into a feeling of serenity and confidence?
- (4) Share with the group the way in which God has enriched you personally.

Gospel [Mark 13 (33-37)]

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It 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.

Watch, 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. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

In the last Sunday of the liturgical year before the Solemnity of Christ the King, which we celebrated last Sunday, we noticed that the Gospels brought us an eschatological message, or preparation for "the last day". This topic continues at the beginning of Advent to emphasize something that all Christians have in common, which is the waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Parousia.

At first glance, the text of this gospel resembles the previous Sundays. However, given that we are in Advent, the emphasis is on the fact that Jesus Christ will come again and that we must wait for the return of the Lord. The disciples are called to be wise and vigilant because once that day arrives there will be not a single minute to bring order or attention where it previously wasn't. Remember that although God's mercy is infinite, He is also a just judge, and we will be judged according to how we have used of the blessings and graces that we have been given to help us to secure a place in the heavenly banquet.

- (1) As "gatekeepers watching for the arrival of the Lord", which signs can you identify that show the presence of God in your life and in your world?
- (2) This message of Christ's Second Coming is known to Christians only because it was revealed in the New Testament. What is our responsibility as people who have had this knowledge revealed to us? How are we called to share it?
- (3) How can we better take advantage of the Advent as a time of preparation to bring us closer to God?
- (4) As Christians, how can we avoid being dragged into the commercialization of Christmas? How can we combat the movement of Christmas to become a holiday without religious meaning for society (In our private lives and in our family, friends and work circles)?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

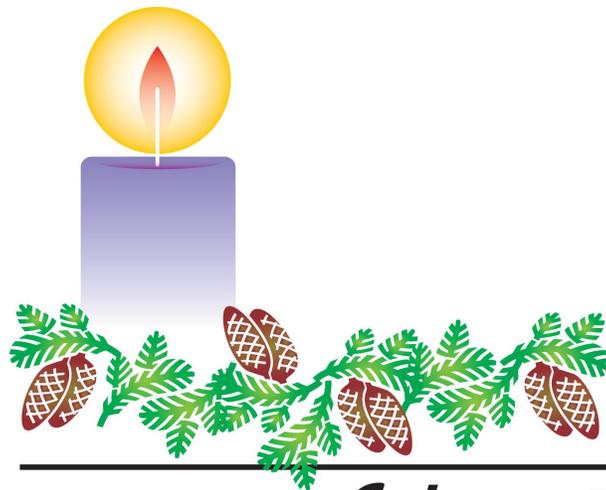
All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees may propose their own petitions to God)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we met, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father and of the Son**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*

Deacon José Moronta DeaconJMoronta @ stmarktampa.org



FIRST SUNDAY OF *Advent*
