

First Reading

Isaiah 63:16b-17,19b;64:2-7

Isaiah prays for the Lord's forgiveness of the people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 80:2-3,15-16,18-19

A prayer for the Lord's protection

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Paul gives thanks to God for the faith of the Corinthians.

Gospel Reading

Mark 13:33-37

Jesus warns his disciples to be watchful so that they will be ready when the Son of Man comes.

Background on the Gospel Reading

Today we begin the season of Advent, which marks the start of a new liturgical year for the Church. The readings for Sunday Mass are arranged on a three-year cycle. Each year features a different Gospel—Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Readings from the Gospel of John are interspersed throughout all three years. With this year's first Sunday of Advent, we begin **Cycle B** of the Lectionary, which focuses our attention on the Gospel of **Mark**. This week and next week, our readings from Mark's Gospel present two important Advent themes: the Lord's return at the end of time and John the Baptist's preparation for Jesus.

Today's Gospel is taken from the end of Mark's Gospel, the chapter that immediately precedes Mark's account of Jesus' Passion. Having been questioned repeatedly by the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus is now questioned by his disciples—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—who want details about his prediction of the destruction of the Temple. Jesus answers with many warnings about the difficulties that the disciples will face.

Today's passage comes at the conclusion of Jesus' warnings to his disciples. Jesus emphasizes the need for watchfulness. The Son of Man will come without warning;

only the Father knows the exact hour. The disciples must not be caught unprepared when this time comes.

Scholars believe that Mark's Gospel was written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Mark's audience consisted of Christians who were living in difficult social and political times, times of conflict. They were likely beginning to face persecution as followers of Jesus. In this difficult time, it helped to recall that Jesus had foretold of such difficulties. Early Christian communities took courage from Jesus' warning to remain alert and watchful, and they found in his words a way to persevere through suffering.

Today's Gospel reminds us that Advent is about more than our preparation for the Church's celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas. Advent is also about preparing ourselves for Christ's return in glory at the end of time. Like the disciples and the faithful in Mark's community, we must also stay alert and watchful. Our faithfulness to God, through the good times as well as the difficult times, shows us to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man.

Family Connection

In family life, we try to prepare ourselves for many future things: our next vacation, our children's education, our retirement. We are careful not to allow ourselves to be caught by surprise so that we can handle any challenges our family may face. Today's Gospel reminds us that we are called to be just as attentive and alert to the coming of the Son of Man so that it will not catch us unprepared. This means attending to our family's spiritual life as carefully as we attend to other important family matters.

As you gather as a family, talk about a time when you received surprise visitors at your house, perhaps a neighbor who stopped by or a relative who arrived unannounced. Was your household prepared to receive this unannounced guest? What might your family have done differently if you knew ahead of time that this visitor was going to arrive? Jesus told his disciples that no one knows when the Son of Man will return, except the Father. Read with your family what Jesus told his disciples in today's Gospel, Mark 13:33-37.

During Advent, we not only prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we also check to see if we are doing all the things that will keep us ready to receive Jesus when he comes again. Talk about how your family can recommit to daily

prayer, reading Scripture, and staying faithful to God's commandments. Pray together that through this Advent season your family will be more prepared to receive Jesus when he comes again. Read as a concluding prayer Paul's words to the Corinthians found in today's second reading, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, or pray the Lord's Prayer.