

**“Marana tha! Come, Lord Jesus!”** (1 Cor 16:22b, Rev 22:20c). The season of Advent is upon us and we have our first glimpse of it with the responsorial psalm on the last day of the old liturgical year. **Marana tha** is an Aramaic expression in the native tongue of Jesus of Nazareth. It means “Our Lord is coming.” The Jewish people lived in hopeful expectation of the coming of the Messiah. As Christians, we live in joyful expectation of the second coming of Jesus.

Two thousand years ago, the first Christians thought Jesus would return in their lifetime. Jesus said to his disciples: “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” (Lk 21:34). As time continues to march on from one century to another, it is easy to see how each succeeding generation can be drowsier than the last. Jesus wants every generation to be prepared. With Advent and the beginning of a new church year, we have an opportunity to start fresh.

If we look at our own expectations with the coronavirus, in March and April people were much more willing to be cautious and to stay socially distant. Seven months later and many are weary. We see this by the desire to gather in groups for the holiday. Lacking vigilance, letting our guard down, we are sure to see a national spike in cases from all the traveling in the lower 48 for Thanksgiving. While a vaccine is on the horizon, the best way to avoid catching the virus is to be prepared. Wear a mask, wash hands as frequently as possible, and stay socially distant from others.

**Marana tha!** Saint Paul uses this Aramaic expression at the tail-end of his 1st Letter to the Corinthians and it is likely to have been used when the community gathered for liturgy. “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Marana tha” (16:22). When the community gathers for Eucharist, we must be prepared to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord in Holy Communion. The phrase “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed” is not meant to curse an individual but to caution them. It implies a call to self-examination before the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Cor 16 footnote). “If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23-24). If we have committed a grave sin, we are not prepared to receive the Eucharist until we have repented and confessed our sins.

We should always be prepared for the Lord’s coming and judgment. **Marana tha** was probably used in the early Christian liturgy. Translated as “O Lord, come!”, it is a prayer for the early return of Christ. One ancient text reads: “Let grace come and this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come; if he is not, let him repent. **Marana tha. Amen.**” (Hahn, Catholic Bible Dictionary 572).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also provides some context (671). Jesus is present wherever two or three gather in his name (Mt 18:20). When the Gospel is proclaimed at Mass, we hear Jesus speak to us. Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. “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. This reign is still under attack by the evil powers, even though they have been defeated definitively by Christ’s Passover. Until everything is subject to him, ‘until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church’ longs for the end of time when Jesus will return in glory. “That is why Christians pray ... to hasten Christ’s return by saying to him: **Marana tha!** ‘Our Lord, come!’”

Saint Paul who wrote **Marana tha** to the Corinthians had good company in the Apostle John. The end of the Book of Revelation also ends with a prayer to hasten Christ’s return. “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” (Rev 22:20c-21).