

## 1st Sunday of Advent, Year C

### GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.

'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

(Luke 21:25–28, 34–36)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Advent is the beginning of the Church's liturgical year.
- The Advent period is concerned with 'waiting' for the coming of the Christ child.
- A recurring theme in the gospels read during Advent is looking towards the end times, when Christ will come again.
- Today begins the cycle of readings for Year C in the Lectionary. This means that most of the gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of Luke.
- The Advent wreath is one way of preparing for the coming of the Christ child. The circle of greenery is a symbol of God's love, without beginning or end, while the candles represent the four weeks of preparation time. One candle is lit each Sunday during Advent, and the final, central candle is lit on Christmas Day.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

Luke's Gospel is written for a Gentile church community who are caught in 'between' times. The early Christians believed that Christ's Second Coming was imminent—that Jesus would return soon as the Lord of Glory. As time passed, they had to rethink this belief. In this text, Luke addresses a community who are able to contemplate the past history of Jesus and the Church while looking forward to his future coming as the Son of Man. The text deals with how Christians are to live in the 'in-between time'. They must be attentive to the Gospel and live in readiness to meet their God. They must not be distracted by the cares and snares of the world, but be ready to stand confidently before the Son of Man.

- What are the things in your life that distract you from the Gospel?
- What are some of the strategies that make it easier to be attentive to the important things in life?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In your life, what things have been 'sprung on you suddenly'? How did you deal with such surprises?
- What does it mean to 'stand with confidence before the Son of Man'?
- Share with each other some of your hopes and fears for the future. Are there particular goals you have set for yourself? How are you preparing for the future? What would you like that future to hold for you? Do you see it as a time of uncertainty, or do you look forward with confidence?
- This week, be attentive to the time you spend in waiting—in traffic, on the phone, to cross the road, for the kettle to boil. Use these small moments of waiting to focus on, and prepare yourself for, the coming of Christ at Christmas.
- Repeat the gospel acclamation often this week:

*Lord, show us your mercy and love,  
and grant us your salvation.*

### SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

The celebration of a feast to honour the birth of Jesus did not emerge in the West until the fourth century. Scholars generally note that by AD 336, such a feast was in place and celebrated in Rome on 25 December. This comparatively late development of a feast to celebrate the birth of Christ may seem surprising to contemporary Christians, for whom Christmas is so central. However, we must remember that the early Christians expected the glorious return of Christ in their own lifetimes. It was only with time and an obvious delay to the Second Coming that such a feast could emerge. Furthermore, time provided the opportunity for a greater and more mature theological reflection on the mysteries of the incarnation and the Second Coming.

Advent, as a period of preparation for the feast of Christmas, developed later still. There is no evidence of such a preparatory time in Rome until well into the sixth century. It was Pope Gregory the Great (AD 590–604) who established a four-week liturgical preparation for Christmas, but the eschatological (end times) themes of the Second Coming were not established until the Middle Ages.

- You could discuss the liturgical symbols and colours of Advent and some of the ways that Christians can use this time of waiting to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

### SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The images of the end times used by Luke in this text were common in Jewish apocalyptic literature of the time. For Christians, looking forward to the final coming of Christ as Lord of all history and all creation is an action filled with hope, because their 'liberation is near at hand.'

### LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Invite candidates and catechumens to make their own Advent wreath for use in their homes during the period of Advent.
- Use an Advent wreath as a focus for prayer during this season. Pray for each other as you prepare to welcome Jesus into your lives. You could use or adapt the candle-lighting ritual in *Gather Australia* (GA 272). There are a number of Advent songs you could use (GA 277–285). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in the RCIA at §94E.

### NOTES

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