

1st Sunday of Advent, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

(Matthew 24:37-44)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Advent is a four-week season of preparation for the coming of Christ at Christmas. The word *advent* means 'coming'. Advent takes up this theme in looking forward to the coming of Christ at Christmas, and especially in looking towards the future coming of Christ at the end times.
- The early church believed that the second coming of Christ—the *Parousia*—was imminent. It could happen at any moment.
- The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the Church's liturgical year.
- This is Year A of the liturgical calendar, during which the Lectionary readings come predominantly from the Gospel of Matthew.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Matthew's Gospel is written for a mostly Jewish audience who had converted to Christianity. Because of this Jewish background, Matthew often uses images and incidents from the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, with which his community were very familiar. For Matthew, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of old, and the Messiah who has long been awaited.

In this text, Jesus twice uses the title 'Son of Man' to describe himself. It is an ambiguous term because it can simply mean a human being but is also used in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the one who will be judge and saviour of all.

- Explore how the term 'Son of Man' is an apt one for Jesus to use of himself.
- This text points to the early church's belief that the end times—the second and final coming of Christ—were imminent and that believers should be ready at all times for this unexpected event.
- Explain how this expectation arose and was later modified in the early church. How can we live in expectation today? What does that mean for followers of Christ?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How do you cope when the unexpected occurs in your life?
- In what ways are you 'alert to life'?
- Exchange some memories of unexpected events in your life that took you completely by surprise. How did you cope? What did you do? You could contrast this by sharing stories of an occasion when you spent a great deal of time and energy in preparing for something that you knew was coming. How did it feel when the long-awaited event finally arrived? Was the preparation useful?
- Be alert and watchful for the needs of others this week, and be ready to respond to those needs. Rejoice in the unexpected.
- One of the prayers of the early church that is linked with this season of waiting and longing is the Aramaic word *Maranatha*, which means 'Come Lord'. Use this prayer as a mantra this week.

