

1st Sunday of Advent, Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all: Stay awake!'

(Mark 13:33-37)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Advent is a four-week season of preparation for Christmas. During this time we reflect on the coming of Christ into human history as a small baby, the coming of Christ at the end of time and the coming of Christ into our own lives each day. Thus Advent has a past, present and future dimension.
- The season of Advent is the beginning of the Church's liturgical year. The Church's liturgical year follows a three-year cycle, and we move today into the second of those, Year B. The gospel readings for this year come predominantly from the Gospel of Mark.

EXPLORING THE WORD

During Advent, in each year of the three-year cycle, the theme of the first week looks to the end times—the eschaton—with an emphasis on the second coming of Jesus and the need to be ready.

In the early church, there was an expectation that Jesus would return quickly. In their post-Easter faith, believers knew that Jesus had been taken up to heaven at the ascension (a man travelling abroad, as mentioned in this gospel?) and that he was remaining with God until the time came for him to return in triumph. For Mark, it is now the Church that waits and must remain always ready to greet the master on his return. The 'waiting' theme of Advent is established: we await the birth of the child and we await the fulfillment of human history at the end times when Jesus comes again.

- What must you do to be fully prepared for the coming of Christ into your life as a Christian?
- What is your greatest expectation at this point in your life?
- In what ways does Jesus give you a glimpse of God?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- This parable describes each of the watchful servants as having 'their own task'. What do you see as your task at this point in your life? How well are you performing it?
- Are you fully open to the possibilities that each moment offers? What 'unexpected' things may hinder being attentive?
- Reflect on the periods of waiting in your life. Pay particular attention to times during this past year when you have had to wait—for the easing of restrictions, for news, for a test result. Use those periods of waiting to reflect on your year, and slowly repeat the 'Maranatha' prayer. Be attentive to the joy that is to come.
- Share stories of a time of waiting in your life: for a child to be born, a house to be built, a longed-for holiday to come around.
- What are some of the positive results of longing and expectation? What are some of the difficulties if the waiting is prolonged?
- Waiting is the dominant symbolic activity of Advent. It is difficult for modern humans to spend time waiting. We are so used to technology making things happen almost instantly and tend to become frustrated at being made to wait. But the waiting of Advent is an active waiting, not a frittering away of time. It is a waiting spent in preparation and reflection.
- The Maranatha prayer is one of the most ancient prayers of the Church. This invocation of Christ conveys the sense of urgency felt by the first believers and their hope for a swift union with Christ. It is a fine short prayer to use often during Advent:

Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

