

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2022**

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 2:1-5	All nations shall come to the house of the Lord.
Psalms 122:1-9	We rejoice in the Lord.
Romans 13:11-14	The night is far gone; the day is at hand.
Matthew 24:37-44	Be ready; the Day of the Lord will be sudden.

Matthew:

Even when major storms are predicted, some will persist in ignoring the warnings and find themselves in great danger. A number of persons in our country lose their lives each year because they will not believe that there is danger not only for their property but for their very lives. They attempt to “ride out” a storm when public safety officials plead with them to seek refuge in a safer place, and they lose their lives.

Some practice the same kind of stubbornness with respect to spiritual warnings. They do not believe the prophets sent by God. The stakes are much higher than earthly life. Eternal salvation is the issue.

Jesus was not a raving fanatic, nor an incendiary zealot. He did not “cry wolf” when there was no danger. He does employ the apocalyptic language of the times in which he lived. The imagery is deliberate and effective. But, it is not just poetry. Apocalyptic prophecy truly represents a message from God.

The “coming of the Man of Heaven” marks the end of earthly existence for the Church. With that “coming,” there will be inaugurated the transformation of all things into heavenly reality. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Church community becomes such a central feature of the message of Christ that it cannot be exempt from the dynamism with which God will deal with the world. The Church, too, will be engulfed in the awesome and cosmic renewal with which God will envelop all of created reality. The Church becomes kingdom. The difference for the Church is that some will be aware and ready for the coming of the Man of Heaven; some will not. “Two men...two women...” One will know what is happening; the other will be caught by surprise. The issue is awareness. Jesus wants us to be aware of what God intends for this creation of his. Jesus wants us to be prepared and willing participants in the transforming of reality. It is not enough just to be passive objects in the mighty dynamisms by which God’s creation becomes God’s true kingdom. God wants us to share in making it happen. Some will and some won’t! All will depend on the choices that we make each and every day. We choose for good or we choose for evil. We are with it or outside of it.

Jesus does not intend to *frighten* his followers into faithfulness and readiness. But he does want to open our *hearts to awareness*. Jesus always calls his followers to become willing partners with him in the building of God’s kingdom. He does not *condemn* those who are not aware and ready. But he *praises and prefers* those who are. Jesus does not say that two men should not be out in the field working or that two women should not be grinding at the mill, any more than that it is wrong for men and women to be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage in the days of Noah. He suggests that it is a matter of where our attention is focused.

Isaiah:

Even the original Isaiah who lived before the Great Exile (587-539 CE) had envisioned a day when the will of God would be the basis for true peace among nations. On that day, even Gentiles would come to the peace that flows from surrender to the majesty of God. God's people stand as a beacon to all who seek peace and desire war no more.

Romans:

Paul speaks of the second coming of Christ, indicating that Christians must be prepared by right conduct. We look forward to the renewal of his first coming; Paul's admonition about putting aside the "work of darkness" is most appropriate for our situation: "not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy" can we anticipate the rebirth of Christ in our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the ways in which you consider yourself *ready, alert, aware* for the coming of God in your life? Do you have an awareness that God is entering into your daily existence through the events that occur every day? Are there some events that more clearly than others alert you to the presence of God? Is it pain and sorrow or joy and peace? What do you consider to be the most effective in helping you stay alert to God?

2. How much do you think the Church is *ready, alert and aware* of the impending return of Christ to the world? Does your parish practice some kind of *readiness training* for the return of Christ? What do you suggest could be done to make the Church community more aware of the need for vigilance in its everyday activities?

3. Discuss what it might mean for you and your family to be more ready for the true meaning of Christmas this year. Are you ready to be more modest in your gift giving to one another and to practice more personal expressions of love rather than expensive gifts and wrappings and ribbons and bows and all the rest? Do you feel called to a simpler kind of Christmas with more prayer than material things?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Hold a family meeting on the subject of the Spirit of Christmas. See if you might be able to evolve as a family toward a more spiritual kind of observance rather than the outward show and display of commercialization of Christmas. Remember that it is really a matter of spiritual maturity to be able to give simpler gifts. It is something we need *to grow into*. We cannot make it happen all of a sudden.

PRAYER

Consider saying the "**Maranatha Prayer**" from the conclusion of the Book of Revelation (rendered in Aramaic in 1 Corinthians 16:22): "**Come soon, Lord Jesus.**"

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

The world in which we live often imagines the future as if it had no reference in present times at all. Futurists offer a vision of a reality that does not seem to have evolved from the conditions that prevail today. There is a sense of disjointedness between today and the situations that are coming upon us. Many would have us believe that we cannot affect our own future; that our present behavior does not really affect what we will be like tomorrow. Wastefulness today does spell disaster for tomorrow, doesn't it? Our children and grandchildren will pay the price for our present-day ecological sinfulness. Can it be otherwise in the realm of the Spirit?

Living recklessly today can only lead to a seriously impaired and impoverished condition of the heart and soul in any future into which we may come. "The wages of sin are death."

"We must stop behaving as people do in the dark and be ready to live in the light. So behave properly, as people do in the day. Don't go to wild parties or get drunk or be vulgar or indecent. Don't quarrel or be jealous."

Our moral behavior will determine the condition we are in when we enter into eternal life. The white robe of salvation we put on in baptism can be stained by our personal and deliberate sinfulness. Then, we will be unacceptable for sitting with the Lord Jesus at the everlasting banquet in the kingdom of God. It is not a matter of indifference whether we do good or do evil. We are accountable for the actions and omissions of our daily living. The season of Advent is given us to prepare both for the final coming of the Lord in judgment and for the renewal of his coming at Christmas. It is a time of eager expectation. Looking forward to the blessings brought to the world by the Christ Child, we need to remember that we prolong and extend those blessings to our times and places in history by the works for good that we perform in anticipation of his final return.

(See: The Catechism #407)

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