

Sunday, November 30, 2014

First Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

(Isaiah 63:16-17,19; 64:2-7; Psalm 80:2-3,15-16,18-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:33-37)

Advent, A Time of Watching, Waiting, and Expectation

Be watchful! Be alert! (Mark 13:33)

And so Advent begins with the call to be alert. There's one group of people, however, who don't need any reminding: children! They watch television ads intently, search the Internet eagerly, and pore over catalogues endlessly, looking for just the right gifts to ask for. We adults would do well to imitate their sense of wonder and enthusiasm.

Yes, Jesus urges us to be alert, but for what? For God to "rend the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 63:19). He wants us to look for ways that he can remove barriers between him and us.

Consider how God answered when the Israelites asked him to open heaven. He didn't just rend the heavens; he stepped through, gathered us in his arms, and invited us to join him for all eternity. Such astounding, abundant generosity!

You know how to give gifts to the people you love. How much more should you expect from God the Father? He loves you completely. He delights in you. He enjoys giving you good things. So go ahead, and ask him for something this Advent.

Maybe you need more patience or more self-control around holiday food and drink. Ask him! Maybe you'd like to feel his presence more concretely or hear him speak to your heart more clearly. Expect it! Then be alert for it as you pray.

Don't limit Jesus only to the small gifts. Open wide the doors of your heart, and let him give you new and unexpected gifts: joy, peace, gentleness, vision, courage. He may not answer exactly as you expect, but that's okay. Let his creativity surprise you. You can be sure that he will give you only good gifts, even if you can't recognize them right away. Just believe that when you ask, you will receive and when you seek, you will find.

"Father, I can't wait to see what you do this Advent! Rend the heavens, Lord, and come down to visit us!"

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. The first reading contains one of the few times in the Old Testament when God is referred to as “our Father.” The reading ends with these powerful words: “Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” What do these words mean to you?
2. Also, in the first reading, we hear these words: “All of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags” (Isaiah 64:5). Why do you think the people’s so-called “good deeds” were so offensive to God? In what ways can our own good deeds be offensive to God? How would you describe the difference between human good deeds and God-inspired deeds?
3. In the responsorial psalm, we cry out to the Lord along with the psalmist to come and save us, so that he will “give us new life and we will call upon his name.” What areas of your life do you need to cry out to the Lord for “new life”? Do you believe as you cry out, he will answer you? Why or why not?
4. In the second reading, St. Paul states that the Corinthians have been “enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge” (1 Corinthians 1:5) and that they “are not lacking in any spiritual gift” (1:7). Yet, later on in this letter, Paul is quite critical of their immaturity, tolerance of open sin, and their own sinfulness. Why do you think that in spite of the great outpouring of the Spirit upon the Corinthians, they had so much difficulty living holy and righteous lives? In what way is this also a warning to you and me as well?
5. In the Gospel reading, Jesus uses such words as “beware,” “keep alert,” “watch,” “stay awake,” and “be on guard” as he describes the events leading up to his second coming. What message was Jesus trying to convey with these words? How do they apply to each of us today during this Advent season of watching and waiting?
6. In the meditation, we hear these words: “You know how to give gifts to the people you love. How much more should you expect from God the Father? He loves you completely. He delights in you. He enjoys giving you good things. So go ahead, and ask him for something this Advent.” The meditation goes on to suggest various things we can ask our heavenly Father for this Advent? What “good things” would you like to receive from Him?
7. Take some time now to pray that Advent would be a special season of grace and expectation for you and all your loved one -- as we await the coming of our Lord. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a member of the NSC Council and a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>), a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the Military, Prisoners, and women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>), for which he is currently a Trustee. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com].