

Sunday, November 27, 2016

First Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

2nd Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Responsorial: Psalm 122:1-9

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44

Advent, *A Season of Hope*

Stay awake! . . . Be prepared. (Matthew 24:42, 44)

Today marks the beginning of the Advent season. History tells us that Advent has been observed since around the fourth century AD. Initially, Advent was seen as a time of preparation, both for new believers to be baptized and for all believers to look forward to Jesus' return in glory. As time went on, the emphasis on the Second Coming and baptism remained, and a new emphasis on Jesus' first coming as a baby grew along with it.

Today, it seems that Advent is much more about celebrating Jesus' first coming rather than anticipating his Second Coming. Still, the Church reminds us to use this time to prepare for Christmas and to let it "renew [our] ardent desire for [Jesus'] second coming" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 524).

So with this double goal of celebration and anticipation in mind, Advent has become a season of hope—hope that the baby born in Bethlehem will return one day and usher in the kingdom of God.

Hope is what helps us step out and believe in what we cannot see. Hope is God's grace to accept that there is a certain amount of mystery to our faith and to still be confident that God can work in our lives.

This is not a blind hope, and it's not all an impossible mystery that we will never understand. In the midst of all the mysteries of our faith, we can still believe because of what we do understand: that God's Son came to us on Christmas in order to save us from our sins and fill us with his Holy Spirit.

So for the next four weeks, let's set our hearts on preparing—first, for Christmas and, second, for Jesus' return in glory. And let's do it filled with confidence and hope. Let's tell Jesus, "This world is not my permanent home. I long for a heavenly home. I long to be with you forever. Come, Lord Jesus."

"O come, O come, Emmanuel!"

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. In the first reading, we hear of the Lord's desire to "instruct us in his ways" so that "we may walk in his paths." It ends with these words: "let us walk in the light of the Lord!"
 - What can you do to allow the Lord to "instruct" you so you can walk in his light in an ever increasing way?

2. The response to the responsorial psalm is the same as last Sunday's response for the feast of Christ the King: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord." The responsorial psalm ends with these words: "Because of my brothers and friends I will say, 'Peace be within you!' Because of the house of the LORD, our God, I will pray for your good."
 - In what ways does our faithfulness to these ending words of the psalm, especially regarding our relationship to family members, other Christians, and other friends affect how joyful we are when we come to mass and during mass?
 - Are there some people you have a hard time saying "Peace be within you" or "I will pray for your good"? Are you willing to allow the Lord to change your heart towards these people, so you can pray for them? If not, why not?

3. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us to "throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." He goes on to tell us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the body."
 - Advent is a good time to examine our life and prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you do so, how might you open more areas of your life to the love and forgiveness of Christ through this grace-filled Sacrament -- and allow him to heal those areas rather than keeping them closed?

4. The Gospel warns us to "stay awake" and "be prepared" since "you do not know on which day your Lord will come." It also speaks of the care and watchfulness, which should be ours as we await the coming of Jesus.
 - In what way, if at all, do you look forward to Jesus' return? What are your thoughts about his second coming at the end of time?
 - What can you do to help you and your family to receive Christ in a deeper way this Christmas?

5. The meditation ends with these encouraging words: "So for the next four weeks, let's set our hearts on preparing—first, for Christmas and, second, for Jesus' return in glory. And let's do it filled with confidence and hope. Let's tell Jesus, 'This world is not my permanent home. I long for a heavenly home. I long to be with you forever. Come, Lord Jesus.'"
 - What steps can you take to allow for a deeper encounter with Jesus at Mass, or during the day during Advent?
 - Are you willing to take some time to draw up a plan to spend more time with the Lord in prayer during Advent? If not, why not?

6. Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord to come more deeply into your heart during this Advent Season -- and for the grace to know and love the Lord more deeply. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

"O come, O come, Emmanuel!"

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is in 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, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at atmblumberg@wau.org.]