

Sunday, December 3, 2017

First Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Responsorial: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Advent, A Season of Hope and Expectation

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

It's the First Sunday of Advent, and you have just received an invitation: *The Most High God requests the honor of your presence at the entry of his Son into the world. This unprecedented event will be followed by a joyous celebration in two locations: heaven and earth. The event will take place on December 25, and you are encouraged to spend the next four weeks preparing for the festivities.*

Welcome to Advent—a season of hope and expectation! Over the course of the next month, you may be part of family gatherings. You might reenact time-honored traditions: buying gifts, decorating homes, and preparing special meals.

And to crown all these observances, Jesus himself will come and visit you. As today's Gospel tells us, we may not know when he is coming, but he promises he will come. Even now, he is looking for new ways to touch your heart. Right now, he is preparing special gifts of grace and blessing for you—Advent and Christmas presents that he will give as you open your heart to him.

What kind of gifts will he give? Reminders of his Father's love. A sense of hope as you face life's challenges. New insights and wisdom that you can share with your loved ones. Freedom from guilt as you lay your sins and failings at his feet. And above all, peace and joy as he tells you that he has you in the palm of his hand.

So take up his invitation today! Do everything you can to be alert and ready to receive Jesus and his gifts. Try to spend a little more time in daily prayer and Scripture reading. Go to Confession so that you can get rid of anything that blocks you from receiving his love and his gifts.

Jesus wants to celebrate with you. And he's given you a whole month to get ready! Step by step, day by day, you can draw closer to the Lord—and feel him draw closer to you!

"Jesus, I accept your invitation. By your Spirit and your grace, help me to get ready for your coming on Christmas Day."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. For more information on how to subscribe to their devotional magazine, go to www.wau.org).

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Questions for Reflection or 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 begins with these words: “You, LORD, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever.” It 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?
 - In what ways do they relate to the New Testament image of God the Father?
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 a human-inspired good deed and a God-inspired good-deed?
3. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist cries out to the Lord to “Rouse your power, and come to save us.” It ends with these words: “Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life and we will call upon his name.”
 - What do you think it means to ask the Lord to “save us” and “give us new life”?
 - What areas of your life do you need to cry out to the Lord for “new life”?
 - Do you believe that 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 every way, with all discourse 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. The Gospel reading begins with these words of Jesus to his disciples, as he describes the events leading up to his second coming: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.” He goes on to warn them further: “Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”
 - Why do you think Jesus was conveying such a message of urgency on being “watchful” and “alert”?
 - As we prepare to celebrate his first coming, how do Jesus’ words apply to each of us today during this Advent season of watching and waiting, and to our anticipation of his second coming in the future?
6. The meditation speaks of Advent as a time when Jesus “is preparing special gifts of grace and blessing for you— Advent and Christmas presents that he will give as you open your heart to him.” It goes on to describe the “kind of gifts will he give?” This includes: “Reminders of his Father’s love. A sense of hope as you face life’s challenges. New insights and wisdom that you can share with your loved ones. Freedom from guilt as you lay your sins and failings at his feet. And above all, peace and joy as he tells you that he has you in the palm of his hand.” Finally, the meditation tells us to “Do everything you can to be alert and ready to receive Jesus and his gifts. Try to spend a little more time in daily prayer and Scripture reading. Go to Confession so that you can get rid of anything that blocks you from receiving his love and his gifts.”
 - What “special gifts of grace and blessing” would you like to receive from Jesus during the grace-filled Advent and Christmas seasons?
 - What steps can you take, including the ones described in the meditation, to “open your heart” more to receive the “special gifts of grace and blessing” that Jesus is preparing for you during this season of grace?
7. Take some time now to pray that Advent would be a special season of hope and expectation for you and all your loved ones -- as you await the coming of our Lord on Christmas. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

***“Jesus, I accept your invitation. By your Spirit and your grace,
help me to get ready for your coming on Christmas Day.”***

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the **Christlife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization** (www.christlife.org/) and a member of the **National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal** (www.nsc-chariscenter.org). Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men** and a former chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]