

Sunday, December 2, 2018

First Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Jeremiah 33:14-16

2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2

Responsorial: Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14

Gospel: Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Advent, A Time to Make Room for Jesus and Prepare for His Coming

The days are coming, says the Lord . . . (Jeremiah 33:14)

We often talk about “The Christmas Story,” as if it were one single story. Actually, it’s made up of a number of individual stories, each of which tells us something unique about the Christ child. The story of the Annunciation tells us about Mary’s openness to God’s plan. The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth tells us how John the Baptist—Jesus’ forerunner—was called at birth. The stories of the shepherds and the Magi tell us that Jesus is worth searching for.

There’s another story we don’t often think about because it’s not as long. It’s the story of the innkeeper whose closed doors led Mary and Joseph to the manger. But just imagine for a moment that he did manage to find room for them after all. His inn, not the manger, would be honored throughout the world. There would likely be a grand church marking its location, and pilgrims would flock to it year after year.

As Advent begins, let’s not be like the innkeeper. He missed a grand opportunity because he didn’t make room for Jesus.

Many of us will gather with family and friends this Christmas. Anyone who has hosted these gatherings will tell you how time consuming the preparations can be. They want to create a pleasant, welcoming environment, so everything has to be just right. But no matter how much work is involved, they don’t mind. The thought of seeing everyone together makes the work feel lighter.

Let’s have this same attitude toward Jesus. Let’s get ready with joy and anticipation, even if it involves some work on our part. Let’s embrace the opportunities to pray a little more, to examine our lives, and to show more love to the people around us.

Our first reading tells us that “the days are coming” when God will visit his people (Jeremiah 33:14). Let’s dedicate the next twenty-three days to making our hearts as open and welcoming as possible so that Jesus will find a comfortable home there.

“Lord, help me to make time for you this Advent.”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading opens with these prophetic words of great promise: *The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; he shall do what is right and just in the land* (Jeremiah 33:14-15).
 - How would you describe the fulfillment of these words from the reading?
 - As you prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord at Christmas, what are some steps you can take to commit your life to Jesus in a deeper way and emulate him by doing “what is right and just”?
2. The Responsorial Psalm begins with these words: *Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and for you I wait all the day* (Psalm 25:4-5). The reading ends with these words: *The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him, and his covenant, for their instruction* (25:14).
 - In the reading, the psalmist asks God to “make known” to us his “ways,” to “teach” us his “paths”, and to “guide” us in his “truth”. In what ways does God teach and reveal his intentions to you?
 - What can you do each day, especially during Advent, to be more attentive to his promptings?
 - What do the ending words of the reading mean to you, and how can you respond to them?
3. The second reading begins with these words by St. Paul: *May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. He goes on to say that loving one another is the key to being blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.* (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).
 - Why is there such a strong relationship between love and being ready to receive Christ at his “coming”?
 - What are some practical steps you can take to demonstrate more deeply Christ’s love, and your love, to your family and to others? In what ways can this love in action help them to be more ready to receive Christ?
4. The Gospel reading begins with Jesus words to his disciples on the difficult signs that will occur prior to his Second Coming: *There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken* (Luke 21:25-26). Jesus continues with these words on how we are to act when he comes: *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand* (21:27-28).
 - Although the Advent Season is a joyful time when we celebrate the first coming of Jesus as a baby, why is it also important to focus on the Second Coming of Jesus, as well?
 - How would you describe the similarities and differences between his First and Second Coming?
5. The Gospel reading ends with Jesus instructing us on how we are to act in light of his Second Coming: *Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man* (Luke 21:34-36).
 - What is your overall reaction to these words of Jesus and how can you respond to them?
 - What do these words, “Be vigilant at all times,” mean to you? What are some things you can do to overcome and root out any of the obstacles that can cause you not to be vigilant?
6. The meditation ends with these words on preparing for Jesus’ coming this Advent: “Let’s get ready with joy and anticipation, even if it involves some work on our part. Let’s embrace the opportunities to pray a little more, to examine our lives, and to show more love to the people around us. Our first reading tells us that ‘the days are coming’ when God will visit his people (Jeremiah 33:14). Let’s dedicate the next twenty-three days to making our hearts as open and welcoming as possible so that Jesus will find a comfortable home there.”
 - What steps can you take during this grace-filled season of Advent to make your heart “as open and welcoming as possible so that Jesus will find a comfortable home there”?
 - How can you respond to these words from the meditation: “Let’s embrace the opportunities to pray a little more, to examine our lives, and to show more love to the people around us”?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to use this Advent Season to draw you closer to him by spending more time with him. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

“Lord, help me to make time for you this Advent.”

[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), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]