

Sunday, December 1, 2019

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 Preparing for Jesus' Coming

You also must be prepared. (Matthew 24:44)

This is it—we have lit the first Advent candle. Christmas is less than four weeks away, so we need to get ready. If we plan on giving gifts, sending Christmas cards, or having guests over for Christmas dinner, now is the time to start planning.

Jesus is saying something similar in today's Gospel reading, but with a different focus: "Get ready; you don't know when I will come again!"

So how can we prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming, both at Christmas and at the Second Coming? Here's one idea: just as you give Christmas gifts to your friends and family, think of a gift you could give the Christ child. Here are some possibilities.

- Set aside an hour each week to sit before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In the quiet of his presence, praise and thank him for becoming a man and saving you from sin and death.
- Serve the needy in some way. Volunteer at a food kitchen, buy gifts for a struggling family, or help decorate the home of an elderly neighbor.
- See where you have strayed from God. Then go to Confession and receive his forgiveness and the grace to follow him more closely.
- Is there anyone you need to forgive? Ask Jesus to help you forgive that person, and then reconcile with them if possible.

As you decide what you will give Jesus, remember: it's not only about what you do to get ready for his coming. It's also about what he wants to do for you.

- As you sit before him in adoration, he wants to give you his peace.
- As you reach out to the needy, he wants to encounter you in his beloved poor.
- As you go to Confession, he wants to fill you with his mercy.
- As you forgive other people, he wants to help heal your wounded relationships.

Jesus is so generous that he wants to help you get ready for him. So slow down this Advent, and let him give you the gift of a willing heart.

"Jesus, I long for your coming. Help me to get ready!"

(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 Discussion:

1. In the first reading, Isaiah speaks of the “days to come” when the Lord will *instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths*. It closes with these words: *For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*
 - What can you do to allow the Lord to *instruct* you so you *may walk in his paths* in an ever-increasing way?
 - In what ways can the prophetic words of the closing verses of the first reading be related to what Jesus has fulfilled in his first coming and will be fulfilled in his second coming?
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 psalm ends with these words: *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those who love you prosper! May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings. 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.*
 - What are the reasons you *go rejoicing to the house of the Lord*?
 - The psalmist instructs us to *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem*. Why do you think this is even more critical now?
 - How important is it to you to pray for the *good* of our *brothers and friends* (including our family)? What fruits have you seen from doing this?
 - 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?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light*. It ends with these words: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.*
 - What messages do you think St. Paul was trying to convey with the opening and closing words of the reading?
 - St. Paul’s words also remind us that 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 reading begins with these words: *Jesus said to his disciples: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”* The reading closes with these words of warning: *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.*
 - In the Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of his second coming at the end of time. How often do you think about or reflect on his second coming? In what way, if at all, do you look forward to Jesus’ return?
 - As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Lord as a little baby, what can you also do to *stay awake and be prepared* for his second coming in glory?
5. In the meditation, this question is asked: “So how can we prepare ourselves for Jesus’ coming, both at Christmas and at the Second Coming?” It goes on to suggest that “just as you give Christmas gifts to your friends and family, think of a gift you could give the Christ child.” The meditation then describes four ways we can “prepare ourselves for Jesus’ coming, both at Christmas and at the Second Coming?” It also reminds us that “As you decide what you will give Jesus, remember: it’s not only about what *you* do to get ready for his coming. It’s also about what *he* wants to do for you.”
 - Of the four gifts to “the Christ child” suggested in the meditation to prepare ourselves “for Jesus’ coming,” which ones are you willing to commit to?
 - During Advent, what do you want Jesus “to do for you”?
 - What can you do to help your family receive the Lord in a deeper way this Christmas?
 - Are you willing to take some time to draw up a plan for Advent? If not, why not?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to know and love him more deeply during this Advent Season, as you prepare for his coming. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as a starting point.

“Jesus, I long for your coming. Help me to get ready!”

[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.]