

Sunday, November 29, 2020

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 Time to Experience More of His Grace and Spiritual Gifts and Draw Closer to the Lord

I give thanks . . . for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:4)

Welcome to Advent! Whether it's your first time entering this holy season or your ninetieth, be assured that God, your heavenly Father, is eager to bestow his grace on you.

As Paul says in today's second reading, God has already poured his grace on you. He has given you access to every spiritual gift as you wait for Jesus to reveal himself to you (1 Corinthians 1:7). And God wants to do even more. He wants you to have a great Advent! He wants to make this season into a time for you to grow closer to him and come to know him better.

That doesn't necessarily mean these days before Christmas will be easy. Your faith might deepen, or you might receive unexpected blessings. But you might also experience hardship or setbacks. Yet no matter what happens, God will reward whatever effort you put into your Advent preparations. That's because he wants nothing more than for you to deepen your relationship with Jesus. That's the grace God is offering you this season.

So dig in! Start by committing to spend more time in prayer this month. Use this magazine to read the Mass readings and meditations with an open heart. Participate in the life of your parish, maybe through Eucharistic Adoration or a service project. Pick up a spiritual book or do an Advent Bible study to develop your understanding of your faith.

Above everything else, be hopeful: "God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son" (1 Corinthians 1:9). That's what this season is all about.

"Father, I want to experience your blessing as I wait and watch and prepare this Advent."

(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. Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?* It ends with these powerful words: *There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt. 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?
 - How does this image of God the Father contrast with the New Testament image of God the Father?
 - In what ways are they the same and in what ways are they different?
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. Once again, O Lord of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted, the son of man whom you yourself made strong.* 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* and that they are *not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 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, 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 Jesus' first coming, how do his words apply to each of us today during this grace-filled Advent season of watching and waiting, and to our anticipation of his second coming in the future?
6. The meditation is a reflection on the second reading and these words: *I give thanks . . . for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus* (1 Corinthians 1:4). It ends with these words: "No matter what happens, God will reward whatever effort you put into your Advent preparations. . . . So dig in! Start by committing to spend more time in prayer this month. Use this magazine to read the Mass readings and meditations with an open heart. Participate in the life of your parish, maybe through Eucharistic Adoration or a service project. Pick up a spiritual book or do an Advent Bible study to develop your understanding of your faith. Above everything else, be hopeful: *God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son.* That's what this season is all about."
 - What special gifts of grace would you like to receive from Jesus during this grace-filled Advent and Christmas seasons?
 - What steps can you take, including the ones described in the meditation, to experience more of his grace and "to deepen your relationship with Jesus" that he is preparing for you during this season of grace?
 - To what extent do you believe these Scriptures quoted in the meditation: *God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son* (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Take some time now to pray that Advent would be a special season of blessing 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.

"Father, I want to experience your blessing as I wait and watch and prepare this Advent."

[Maurice Blumberg 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 is also a current leader of his parish ChristLife, Healing, and Men's Ministries. He can be contacted at mblumberg@aol.com.]