

## Praying the Sunday Gospel

### Advent I – Cycle A

November 27, 2022

[Matthew 24:37-44]

#### **Background on the Theology and Spirituality of Advent**

During the first 300 years of the evolving life of the Church, the liturgy revolved around the Death-Resurrection of Jesus the Christ and our share in it through the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The Church did not yet see the need for a Feast of Christ's birth; since the birth of Christ's body was happening anew in the welcoming of new members. In that early era of the Church, Advent was not yet a season yet Advent spirituality was very strong because of the conviction that Christ's return in glory would happen very soon.

After the conversion of Constantine, Christmas began to emerge as a special celebration (around 336 AD) and accordingly Advent took on a new life and meaning. At the beginning, Advent was modelled on 6 weeks of fasting, the pattern of preparation for Easter; however the goal was longing for the parousia, the second coming of the Lord.

Christians began to appreciate the prophetic texts of Isaiah as not only preparing people for the first coming of the Messiah but also as the announcing of the process also needed for the Lord's second coming – a being gathered into the Kingdom when all people and all creation would be restored to their original unity. We would all be “one-in-Christ.” The Eucharist was understood as our foretaste of the future banquet and our full communion with God and each other. Each Eucharist proclaimed the very real desire of the Church for the Lord's return, his “parousia” or “advent.”

Advent, then, is more than a season; it is an attitude and posture of confident, joyful, hopeful expectation that should be part of every Christian's life each day. It is a way of looking at “the world” and all our activities with hope that by opening our hearts together to God and each other we can move beyond fragmentation and compartmentalization into a profound harmony and unity.

We remember the first coming of Christ (and the long preparatory period of the Old Testament) so as to be better prepared for the second coming.

Our Advent waiting in hope has a unique quality: We are hoping for what we already have! Christ is already with us. He came among us and remains with us as we gather and serve in his name. His “second coming” is not necessarily a new/different apparition but the full unfolding of the light of his presence and our complete openness to that gift.

At that “moment” signs vanish and sacraments would no longer be necessary for we are – together – enjoying the endless dawn of the “day” of eternity. So it is that Advent Sunday Scriptures challenge us to “awake from sleep” and “throw off works of darkness.”

Our Advent hope and waiting are very different from the way the world uses these terms: We believe we have already been delivered from all that prevents us from enjoying communion with God and each other. Our hope is not for “more of “this” (selfish hopes) but for the realization and acceptance of God’s gift regarding how and why we were created in the first place: for communion with God and each other in harmony as one world, one family of faith.

### **Background on the Gospel**

This gospel for the First Sunday of Advent emphasizes the “in-breaking” of God into human history and especially into our personal lives. We can be sure of his “coming” but it will happen at a day and hour that will surprise us.



The short “parables” of Jesus emphasize being in a state of readiness: the people at the time of Noah and the flood were absorbed in “normal” activities and died. Two workers in the field or in the kitchen will experience the same sudden interruption but one will enter the Kingdom (“taken”) and the other will be “left behind,” consigned to condemnation.

The reference to the Lord coming “like a thief in the night” reinforces the point there will be no “pre-announcement” of his coming.

Again, it is important to remember that the coming of the Lord is not confined to the “end” of the world; God’s “in-coming” happens in various ways every day of our lives. We have our “personal” parousia when we meet the Lord at death. Therefore, our whole life should be an anticipation of the very certain encounter awaiting us and all it will mean.

## **Points for Prayer and Reflection**

1. Advent is a way of life, being fully alert to the present moment but yet detached from earthly worries and expectations because we know we have a “higher calling.” We are to use the present time to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord. Pray for that grace. Take time in quiet to deepen your friendship with the Lord.
2. The gospel speaks of Christ coming like a thief – an odd image but it makes the point: his coming cannot be predicted. Second, St. Therese of Lisieux said this image is appropriate: he comes to “steal” our soul from this world. It’s for our own good he’s going to snatch us away. Pray for detachment from everything of this life, even loving relationships, trusting they will be given back to us in the Kingdom.
3. We cannot rush the end-times nor can we stop them from happening. We don’t control “the clock.” We can only adjust and accept. Pray for the grace of humility and patience and the ability to live this moment with gratitude. Remember to pray especially for those who are living with great anxiety about death or some fear of a tragic ending.
4. The second reading today from Romans 13 speaks about awakening from sleep and that “the Day” is at hand. Most of us probably get drowsy and bumble through the day only half-alert spiritually. St. Augustine was finally converted when he read these very words from Romans 13. Let these same words challenge you too!
5. Have a conversation with Jesus coming to be with you already now, inviting you to start living in a new manner with new priorities.
6. Since this is the first day of the new Church year, do you have a resolution you’d like to make? Would you also like to be “released” from the broken promises of the past year? Ask God’s mercy for you and also for all people everywhere, especially those most in need of it.
7. Advent is about time and how we use/appreciate it. At this point in the year, every minute is given great value; we all have many “tasks” we want or need to accomplish. Prayer is also about time with/for God and others. Precisely because days are short and time is limited, our time is the best gift we can offer back to God. Pray “re-deems” time! Try to be “really present” to the Lord in the Eucharist.