

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

First Sunday of Advent Gospel Word
Matthew 24:37–44

Today, we begin the new Church year. During this year most of the Gospel readings will come from the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel according to Matthew was written especially for Jewish converts to Christianity. It contains many references to Jewish Scriptures and often speaks of the messiah who was the hope of Israel. Today also marks the beginning of Advent. During Advent we prepare for three comings of Christ, in the flesh at the Incarnation, in our daily lives, and in his final coming at the end of time. In Advent we come across references to all three comings. The Gospel reading for today helps us focus more on the second coming with its reference to the coming of the "Son of Man." Sometimes the Church refers to the time in which we live as "between the times." It is the time between the first coming of Christ which we celebrate at Christmas and his second coming at the end of the world. Jesus refers to himself in this Gospel reading as the "Son of Man" who will come at the end of time. This title is not new. But in the Gospels it is important to note that the title is only used by Jesus about himself, not about anyone else. He calls himself the "Son of Man" thirty times in the Gospel of Matthew. The use of this title does not take away from Jesus' divinity but it enhances the mystery of the God made flesh.

What does this title mean and why does Jesus use it? It was used in the Old Testament about specific people such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. In the Book of Daniel (7:13-14), it is used as an allusion to the coming messiah who would come at the end times with power and save the people from oppression. He would come with power, like one coming from the heavens in a very dramatic fashion, in some ways almost as the kind of super-action figures we see in today's movies and video games.

-by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

So did Jesus come like that? Did he come from the sky, breathing lightning bolts that destroyed the Roman occupying force? Not in his first coming. He came as one of us. There's something in us that wants God to be the kind of powerful that we define as powerful. But God's power is the power of love, forgiveness, and healing—not physical force. And where there is love in our world, there is God. Where there is charity and love, God's presence is often subtle and simple, but it contains great power.

We don't know when Jesus will come again. At the same time we know he is here among us. Ask yourself: "Where is love happening in my life? Where am I the most loving and caring for the welfare of others? Where in these next four weeks can I bring the presence of Christ to others? Love can be anywhere and so can God be everywhere, present and acting through us, even the simplest of activities. A foundational belief of our Christian faith is that ordinary acts of kindness and love are of great value and power. But it is easy to forget if we are slaves to our culture and our times. Today, society values power over other people, and having a reputation that puts us at the top, and having more money is even better. These are not Gospel values. They can also distract us from being prepared and awake to the presence of God in our life and ready for the second coming.

Against the power of society's values are the values that Christ offers us, especially that of loving and helping others through ordinary acts of love. When we engage in loving acts regularly, we are knee-deep in the sacred. We are surrounded by God's grace. We are filled with God's Spirit. We are awake. The possibilities are endless. "Stay awake" the Gospel warns, because you don't know when or where God will visit. When the Son of Man does come back at the end times, it is our daily loving actions that will determine whether we stayed awake and are prepared. They will determine our particular judgment.

One-line Prayer

Son of Man, open our eyes to your coming into our lives each day.
Amen.