

# Connecting With the Sunday Readings

## First Sunday of Advent

Today, we begin the new Church year. During this year, most of the Gospel readings will come from the Gospel according to Matthew. Scholars tell us that this Gospel 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.

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 and his second coming at the end of the world. During the season of Advent, we remember that there will be a second coming and we also recall the coming of Christ to us in our daily lives and in Eucharistic celebrations. So, when you think about it, there are actually 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 find references to all three comings.

## A Gospel Word for the Home Matthew 24:37–44

Today’s Gospel reading speaks of the coming of “the Son of Man.” Who is he? And why is he mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel? Scholars note that this title for the messiah was quite popular in the years just prior to his coming in the flesh. At the time of Jesus’ birth the Jewish people felt very much under the control of the foreign powers who ruled their land. They felt powerless and enslaved to the wishes of the Roman rulers. They hungered for a messiah, someone sent from God who would deliver them from bondage. Thus, their writing began to mention a certain “Son of Man” who would come and redeem them. What was often emphasized was his coming with power, like one coming from the heavens in a very dramatic fashion. We might think of him as a kind of Superman figure.

So did Jesus come like that? Did Jesus come from the sky breathing lightning bolts that destroyed the Roman occupying force? Of course not; he came as one of us. There’s something in us that wants God to show the kind of power we define as power. But God’s power is the power of love, not physical force. And where there is love in our world, there is God. 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 as a parent? As a spouse? As a grandparent? As a friend? As a neighbor?” Love can be anywhere, and so can God be everywhere, present and acting through us, even in the simplest of activities. The possibilities are endless. “Stay awake” the Gospel warns, because you don’t know when or where God will visit.

## Parent Survival

We can endure almost any pain or difficulty when we know that what we are doing is worthwhile. On the other hand, if it doesn't make sense, if it seems meaningless, then the weight grows heavier and the pain cuts deeper. And we find ourselves very tired at the end of the day. A wonderful part of our Christian faith is that ordinary acts of kindness and love are valued so much. But it is easy to forget if we are slaves to our culture and our times. Today, society values power over others, and a reputation that puts us at the top, and the more money the better. These are not Gospel values.

In contrast to this kind of power 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 for our children, something parents do regularly, we are knee-deep in the sacred. We are surrounded by God's grace. We are filled with God's Spirit. Be awake to this. If you want God to appear in your midst, do something to support your children, your teens, your older children. It all counts. It's all meaningful. Knowing and believing this makes the difficult times of parenthood much more bearable.

## Car or Meal Talk

Help your children realize that acts of love and kindness are ways of making God present in the world. Tell them that during Advent we want to bring God more fully into our family life. Ask them to suggest ways to do this.

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

## One-Line Prayer

God the Son, open our eyes to your coming into our lives each day. Amen.