

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

First Sunday of Advent **Gospel Word**

Luke 21:25-28,
34-36

This is a passage from one of the final chapters of the Gospel according to Luke. It describes the second coming of Jesus, which in the early Church was thought to be very soon. The message is clear: stand up with your head held high because Jesus is coming again. Why this reading for the First Sunday in Advent? Because during Advent, preparing to remember and get our hearts ready for Jesus' birth is not the sole goal for the Christian. Advent is also the time to remember and get our hearts ready for the second coming of Jesus.

We're always looking forward to the future. We watch the weather forecast; we listen to people who claim they know where the stock market is going, and we listen to all sorts of futurists who claim some kind of special knowledge about what's coming. Some people can get caught up in reading the signs of the end-times into contemporary life happenings. They even foretell when it will happen and stress that it is imminent. Maybe it is and maybe it's not. That is not the point. The point is no matter when it is—**BE READY** to stand firm. Good Advent practices result in people who change their lives. They turn indifference to those around them into love of even the unknown neighbor. They turn fear into trusting God, and the evidence is their own life's actions. These are the signs of life that Jesus will look for on his return.

Living the Word

In some ways this is a challenging Church season. The Church encourages quiet reflection while at the same time the secular world creates consumer excitement for children and parents. Hit the mall; race through shopping catalogs; send cards or e-mails with Christmas greetings; prepare for visits to family, other relatives, and friends. Crank up anxiety levels. We can get lost in the activity and the seduction of consumerism can, if we allow it, pull us away from practicing justice. The pull comes in little ways such as manipulating to be the first in line and therefore being disrespectful of others, or in larger ways such as buying more than we need or can afford, and neglecting the needs of the poor.

Using the next four weeks, take a short time every day to be quiet. Think about your deeper needs and desires. Open yourself to gratitude for all the gifts God has given you and the world since the dawning of creation. Seek peace within and a deeper sense of the presence of a loving, caring, and generous God whom you look forward to knowing more fully. Ask for a willingness to act justly.

To do this may mean changing your schedule a bit—spending a little more time in prayer and quietness, or choosing a different time to get up, go to bed, or return home from work. Use the extra ten or fifteen minutes to be quiet, grateful, and prayerful. There is nothing essentially bad about all the pre-Christmas activity but it can distract from the real call of the Advent season. It can focus us on the wrong message and cause more than the usual stress. All of that can deafen us to the call of the Gospel and the spirituality of justice which involves taking care of the poor and oppressed, being merciful and forgiving, and welcoming the stranger.

One-line Prayer

Dear God, you have given us so much. Open our eyes and hearts to those in need. Amen.