

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

First Sunday of Advent

Although the setting of today's Gospel reading comes near the end of the Gospel according to Luke, the Church places it on the first day of the liturgical year, to remind us that during Advent we are not only to prepare for the season of Christmas but also the second coming of Jesus.

Jesus came into human history and began a new era. He inaugurated God's Kingdom on earth as "the Lord our justice" (Jeremiah 3:16). When he comes again it will be a time of salvation for those who have acted with justice. Those who are not ready, whose spirits are "weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life" will be trapped (Luke 21:34-35).

A Gospel Word for the Home

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

We look forward to the future. For example, we watch the weather forecast; we listen to people who claim they know where the stock market is going. In today's Gospel reading we look forward to what to expect when Jesus comes again.

Thought for the Week

People can get caught up in reading the signs of the end-times into life's contemporary 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 families who change their lives from indifference to those around them—to love of even the unknown neighbor, and from fear—to trusting God and the evidence of their life's actions. These are the signs of life that Jesus will look for on his return.

Parent Survival

In some ways this is a difficult 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. This is the exciting time. Or is it?

This Advent takes a short time every day to turn down the lights (as happens in nature). 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 for the next four weeks—spending a little more time in prayer and quietness, or getting up, going to bed, or returning home from work at different times. Use those 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.

Car or Meal Talk

Ask the family what's most important for each family member during this time of the year. Start with yourself.

One-Line Prayer

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