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First Sunday of Advent - 27 November 2022

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27 November 2022

First Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Angela Marquis

Introduction

Today we celebrate the beginning of the Church's year. Advent is a time of waiting. Over the next four Sundays the readings will take us through prophecies, promises, annunciations and fulfilment. Today we prepare our hearts and minds in anticipation of Christ's coming. We are called to reflect upon our own lives: to watch and pray.

Penitential Act

The Advent Wreath Responsory (see 'Advent Wreath Year A) often replaces the Penitential Act and therefore leads into the Collect.

Or use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came that we might have life. Lord have mercy.

You raised the son of the widow of Nain. Christ have mercy.

You promise us eternal life with the Father. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered at his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Advent opens with a call to run forth to meet the Christ, however it is not the babe in the manger. The Christ to whom we run is the one who is to come, in whom is the fulfillment of all things. Advent, then, begins with a focus on the second coming of

Christ, a perspective carried in the first Advent Preface: *when he comes again in glory and majesty.*

Our collect has a sense of energy and purpose. The use of 'run' is quite common in the ancient orations and conjures something of that running to the empty tomb on Easter morning, and even the eagerness of the forgiving father to meet his prodigal son (Lk 1:11-32). We need to be mindful that the prayer is a petition. There is no claim to privilege or worthiness here. Rather we are seeking the eagerness to propel ourselves to the coming One because we have in grace lived as fully as possible within his righteousness. The end point is to be 'gathered' into Christ, conveying warmth and intimacy: disciples are gathered. Further to 'possess' means to fully belong and to be taken up by. With the coming of Christ is our perfection (in his righteous deeds), belonging (gathered) and fulfilment (possession).

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5

Israel anticipates the reign of God's Kingdom, when the seeds of God's compassion and mercy will flourish, and peace will reign.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 121: 1-2, 4-5, 6-9. R. cf. v. 1

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord

The psalmist rejoices in a hymn of praise, thanksgiving, and peace. Our feet stand on sacred ground in the gates of God's house.

Second Reading

Romans 13:11-14

St Paul reminds us to put on the armour of Christ as we anticipate his coming. We are to step forward into the light and to live in its brightness.

Gospel Reading

Matthew 24:37-44

Life is fleeting. The Matthean Jesus warns us to be vigilant and expect the unexpected. We cannot know the day nor the hour. We must stay awake.

Reflection

Almost three years ago, on the 12th of December 2019, a new viral outbreak was detected in the City of Wuhan, China. Covid-19 spread throughout our world and has arguably changed the lives of the global population forever. While the initial outbreaks in China, Italy, Brazil, the US and the UK (among many others) were certainly devastating, cases remained of people who were exposed to the virus yet did not contract it. Others were exposed, became ill and recovered. Many have had long lasting effects, and millions have also died.

The fact that family members from the same household have had such a wide range of outcomes from potentially the same exposure, reminds us of the precarity of life, and the lack of control we have over our own health and ultimately, our death.

Then two will be in the field, one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together, one will be taken and one will be left (vv. 40-41)

Humans have certainly found ways of prolonging life. We can reduce pain, retain youth, and ensure the comfort of ourselves, our parents, and our children. We can also resuscitate our loved ones after they have died, and delay death using medications and machines. Ultimately, however, our lives are fragile, and we never truly 'know the day' when death will call us from this world (v.42). Yet, our ability to prolong life for some is at the expense of denying life to others. When almost half of the world's wealth and resources are owned and utilised by a mere 1% of the population, it doesn't take us long to work out the probability of which woman will be taken from grinding meal, and which man will be left to work in the field.

Jesus asks us to 'stay awake,' to remain vigilant, to keep watch (v.42). His command imparts a sense of trepidation, a nervous energy that often reflects our fear of death, for death is the great unknown. Matthew situates this particular story as part of the dramatic set of teachings in and around the Temple, after Jesus has triumphantly entered Jerusalem. He has cleansed God's 'house of prayer' which had been turned into 'a den of robbers' (Matt. 21:13), chastised the Scribes and the Pharisees (23:13-36), and even cursed a fig tree (21:18-19). Far from proclaiming a comfortable life of discipleship, Jesus has warned his followers (and his adversaries) of impending doom through the parables of the wicked tenants (21:33-44) and the wedding banquet (22:1-14), and prophesied the wars, famines and earthquakes to come (24:7). Finally, in this Gospel, for the first Sunday of Advent, Jesus heralds his ultimate plea to the disciples, uttered days later in the garden of Gethsemane: stay awake, 'Watch and pray' (26:41).

While today's Hebrew scripture and the psalm proclaim such praise and rejoicing as we might associate with birth and the coming of Christ, the language of the Gospel is dramatically negative. Or is it? There is something mysterious about this inversion, this warning to 'watch out' as we head towards the Nativity. Death, destruction, pain, suffering, change and the unknown. All these possibilities haunt us as we go about our lives, but surely as we head towards Christmas, and the celebration of the birth of the Saviour, we might be excused from reminders of the flood. Why reflect on the end when it is all just beginning?

As we wait for the 'master' (v.42), or 'the Lord' as most translations inscribe, who are we expecting? Jesus, risen? God? The Holy Spirit? The Son of Man coming on the clouds? Might we expect an infant, I wonder?

Who is the Lord if not every infant born into poverty, every starving child, every broken woman, every displaced person. Jesus 'comes again' in every cry for help on a rickety boat, in every silent scream of a mother losing her child. To be watchful and ready is to be aware of the suffering and death in all the world and to work towards alleviating it, remembering that each suffering person is Jesus, Lord, Master, come again.

St Paul encourages the Romans to put on the armour of Christ – to live in the light and be as people of God. What is the armour of Christ? Love, of course. Yet, love is not a defensive armour, such as a shield of iron or steel. Love does not shelter us from the world, rather it breaks us down, removes our protective coatings, makes us vulnerable. Anyone who has been in love, or loves deeply, or has known love, understands that love pierces our hearts, causes us to feel, to know, and to be, authentic and real.

We watch and wait, not from a place of safety, not in the sure knowledge that we have the answers, that we can expect our rightful place in heaven, but with the unsurety of brokenness, of people who truly know what love is. Love is the crucified Christ. Christ, betrayed, abandoned, forgotten, hanging, nailed to a tree. As a babe opens her arms in vulnerability from the cradle, Jesus opens his arms on the cross. His love is vulnerable. His love is broken. His love can only be real for he has given his all, his entire being, in bestowing love upon us.

So yes, we must wait and watch and stay awake. But not for one event, one salvation, one personal coming of God. Rather, the small everyday comings of Christ, the moments of pain and suffering and death that fill our world and shake our senses. Awake to these moments, we are broken in love, and in turn can open our own arms on the cross.

We do not know the hour we will be called as we head towards home, to the eternal resting place, the protective walls of Jerusalem, and God's final embrace. Let us pray that when it comes, we are already sitting with Christ, alleviating the suffering of another, broken in love for the world.



Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we gather here today rejoicing in the house of God, let us bring together our needs and the needs of all God's people.

Petitions

We pray for the Catholic Church as she moves towards the Synod of 2023. During this time of Advent may the world see a longing for Christ our Saviour.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of the world that they may exercise their office for the work of peace and unity among all peoples.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the ones burdened with suffering, especially those who have lost hope and find no meaning in their lives. We pray that they hear and welcome the Good News brought to them by those who care that salvation is close at hand.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the people gathered here today that we may be granted the grace to stay awake and to see the love of God in the events of our lives.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that in this time of Advent, as we anticipate the incarnation of Christ your Son, that all may come to together in unity and joy.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that all gathered here will not be distracted by the consumerist pressures of this pre-Christmas time and therefore be able to be moved with the longing of Advent.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have died and those who are in mourning for the loss of loved ones. May salvation become evident in their lives through the blessings of the Advent season.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, in your great mercy and love you give us this opportunity to pray to you. We implore you to accept these prayers through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1	S&S2
Advent litany				279		253		
Come, O Jesus, come, O Lord					658			
Come O long expected Jesus					657	232		
Come to set us free	39			277		233		
Find us ready							109	
Hark! a herald voice is calling						239		
I rejoiced							84	
Let us go rejoicing								278, 279
O Emmanuel			52			241		
Open the heavens		163				243		
Out of darkness	134			404				
Sing to God with joy and gladness						603		
The coming of our Lord					816	248		
To you, O Lord, I lift my soul					850	632		
Wait for the Lord				283		251		
Wake, awake for night is flying				282	853	252		
When the King shall come again						249		
Word of justice (Advent Litany)						253		

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 121: *Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 121	172	72	pg. 8	pg. 6	pg. 96

Music selections by Michael Mangan

O Emmanuel (TT/SYJ/CWBII) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]
Come, Lord Jesus, come CH & V1 (SYJ/CWBII) [Lighting Advent Wreath]
To you, O Lord (LCC) *Ps 24/25 (Chn's Lectionary)* [Seasonal Psalm]
Help me know your ways (FWS) *based on Ps 24 (25)*
Advent alleluia (*Vs 1*) (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]
We rejoice (SYJ) *based on Ps 121 (122)* [Gathering, Gifts]
Watch out, wake up (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]
We come, we come (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]
Waiting for the child (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]