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## First Sunday of Advent - 3 December 2023

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## 3 December 2023

### First Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Michele Purcell

#### Introduction

The readings for the First Sunday of Advent challenge us to acknowledge God's constant faithfulness to Israel and to us today. Although we may find it difficult to see God in our lives, we are urged to remember God's past devotion to us. This should not prevent us, however, from loudly lamenting and crying out to God in prayer when we feel sorely neglected.

#### Penitential Act

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

Lord Jesus, you came so that we could know the Father. Lord have mercy.

You are the mercy of God. Christ have mercy.

You will come again. 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 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8**

*Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter.*

Isaiah reminds God of the covenant commitment made to Israel. He accuses God of not properly supporting the chosen people, causing them to harden their hearts and stray from God's ways. The prophet begs God to "tear the heavens open and come down" – to once again guide the people who are, after all, just like clay needing to be reformed in the hands of their Father, the potter.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

**Psalm 79(80):2-3, 15-16. 18-19**

*Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.*

Today's psalmist makes a heartfelt call for help on behalf of a people who feel their God has neglected them. The psalm reminds God of the commitments a faithful God should have towards a chosen people. It asks why a careful gardener would put such effort into planting the vine, Israel, only to abandon it. The psalmist also images God as a shepherd and reproaches God for failing to protect the flock.

## Second Reading

### 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

*God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ; and God is faithful.*

In 1 Corinthians, Paul assures his readers they can confidently leave the future in God's hands because they have already been given all the graces and gifts they need as they wait for the return of Christ Jesus.

## Gospel Reading

### Mark 13:33-37

*Stay awake! You never know when the Lord will come.*

As we begin our reading of Mark's Gospel in this new liturgical year, Jesus is seen as the Prophet in the Temple, using a parable of the master returning home, encouraging, urging, admonishing his disciples to be awake and ready for the Master's imminent, unexpected return.

## Reflection

Mark's Gospel was written around 70 CE. The author is writing for a Christian community which has experienced persecution and martyrdom at the hands of the Roman colonisers. The followers of Jesus were also being shunned by many of the Jewish population who feared continued collaboration with them. The civil and domestic turmoil which was forecast by Jesus in Chapter 13 may well mirror what had actually been happening to Mark's readers. The followers of Jesus are summoned to faithful vigilance during this troubling long time between the Resurrection and the promised coming again of Jesus.

In today's Gospel Jesus warns his disciples to "Stay Awake!" and be alert for the coming of the Lord. In Chapter 13 Jesus had been speaking to four of his disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew – but his final words are clearly addressed "to all" (13:37). *All* the followers of Jesus, women and men – those living in the first century CE and those living today, must be ready and alert for the coming of the Lord.

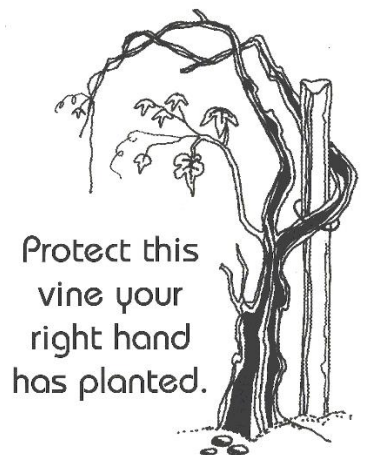
The reading includes the short parable of the master who goes on a journey and leaves his servants in charge of his household. The master commands them to stay alert, and to perform all their usual tasks until he returns. The servants, however, do not know when this return will be. It seems disturbing that this parable adopts the model of the oppressive Roman imperial structure – that of an absentee landlord and his slaves – without criticism. Surely Jesus can't be using a Roman master to image himself – or the God of Israel. Could Jesus' followers really be heartened by this unlikely parable to maintain their hope of his promised return? While waiting, they are being instructed to continue their master's business. But, for Jesus' followers, what *are* these tasks – surely not those that simply prop up and enrich a landowner at the expense of those who have nothing? No! The disciples of Jesus need to be busy with sorts of tasks that Jesus modelled and prioritised. These include proclaiming the Good News to all nations (1:14, 13:10), casting out demons (1:34), healing the sick (6:13), and serving the needs of others (10:44). They are non-

violent, subversive actions which embody and announce God's reign in a world dominated by Roman overlords. God is not portrayed as angry or vengeful in this parable – just absent.

As followers of Jesus today, we are, in the same way, called to be alert to the signs of the times and to actively strive to forge a new social order. This faithful waiting is not the fearful waiting of Roman slaves who might well anticipate punishment if caught unawares or in neglect of their duties. Christians eagerly await the return of their beloved Lord – ever ready to rejoice in his return and to lovingly embrace him once again.

We may wonder from time to time, however, how we will recognize God in our lives. In the first reading today, the exiles want God to manifest divine power in a way that will be quite spectacular. But, as always in Advent, we remember that God is revealed in the form of tenderness and love – the love that comes with the birth of a vulnerable newborn child. Advent asks us to embody Christ and to watch for his presence in everyone we meet – particularly among those who have the greatest need. The reading from Isaiah reminds us that, although we may become discouraged from time to time, we are like clay in the hands of the Divine Potter – and we trust that we will be reformed into a faithful and hope-filled people. Advent is a time to pause in our busy-ness and to allow God the space to do this.

As I write this reflection, voting in the referendum for The Voice has already begun. By the first Sunday of Advent, December 3, 2023, we will all be living with Australia's decision: a "Yes" vote, which will validate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as the indigenous people in our country and will give them a voice in the constitution – or a "No" vote, which would deny them both these things. Today's Gospel would surely compel us to follow in Jesus' footsteps and support some of the most disadvantaged people in Australia. We know the gap in living standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is *not* closing. Surely all Christians are now obliged to challenge the status quo – just as Jesus challenged the Roman subjugation of the colonised Palestinians in his day. We are being challenged to Wake up! Watch out! Stay alert for any sign of the presence of Jesus among us today and to then act as his faithful disciples. Jesus, as always, stands with those who are the most disadvantaged and who are the most loved by God.



## **Prayer of the Faithful**

### **Introduction**

As we gather here today, we are called by the psalmist to turn to God, to see God's face. We see God in the way our prayers are answered so let us pray:

### **Petitions**

We pray for the leaders of our Church as they walk the synodal journey, that during this time of Advent they will follow St Paul's example and be grateful for how we have been enriched through the graces we have received through Jesus Christ.

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

We pray for the leaders of the world in this time of stress, war and violence 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 those who are burdened with suffering, especially those who are unable to be with their families. May the caring hands that support them show the evidence of Christ's presence among us.

*(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 and be aware of the work yet to be done to ensure that our indigenous people are lifted from disadvantage.

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

We pray in this time of Christmas preparation that all those who have not heard of Jesus Christ will be drawn towards an understanding of him as the light in the world through the way we witness to the gospel.

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

We pray for all those who have died and for those who mourn at this time of the year when separation and grief are accentuated by Christmas celebrations. May they be filled with love and hope.

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

### **Conclusion**

Father, as we turn to see you in the love shown in the world, we ask that you to accept these prayers through the name of Jesus your Son, and in the power of the Spirit.

**Amen.**

**Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva**

<b>Title</b>	<b>AOV 1</b>	<b>AOV2</b>	<b>AOVK</b>	<b>CWB</b>	<b>CWBII</b>	<b>GA</b>
A song of the Lord's coming					479	
Advent litany					253	279
Christmas is coming (verse 1)			55			
Come, O Jesus, come, O Lord				658		
Come, O long expected Jesus				657	232	
Come to set us free	39					277
Eye has not seen	146					466
Hark! a herald voice is calling					239	
O come, O come Emmanuel	174			763	242	285
O come, Divine Messiah					240	
O Emmanuel			52			
O God, our help in ages past	175				568	459
Open the heavens, Lord		163			243	
Take comfort, God's people				813		
The coming of our Lord				816	248	
To you, O Lord, lift my soul				850	632	
Wait for the Lord					251	283
Wake, awake for night is flying				853		
Wake, O wake, and sleep no longer						282
Wake, awake, the night is dying!					252	

<b>Title</b>	<b>S&amp;S1</b>	<b>S&amp;S2</b>
Come, O Lord		287
Find us ready	109	

**Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy**

Psalm 79: *Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved.*

	<b>CWB</b>	<b>GA</b>	<b>JOBB</b>	<b>LPB</b>
Psalm 79	173	47	pg. 7	pg. 6

**Music selections by Michael Mangan**

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