



## **The First Sunday of Advent – November 28, 2021**

"Now when these things begin to take place, look up because your redemption is drawing near."  
"

*Question of the Week: How has your image of God, and His promises, changed with time?*

- **First Reading: Jeremiah 33: 14-16**

I will raise up for David a just shoot

- **Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25: 4-5, 8-10, 14**

*R: To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.*

- **Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:12 - 4:2**

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all

- **Gospel: Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36**

Be vigilant at all times

### **Reading 1: The Righteous King**

Jeremiah, a prophet of priestly descent, lived through the reign of three Judean kings: Josiah (627-609 BC), Jehoiakim (608-598 B.C.), Zedekiah (597-587 B.C.) As he matured, Jeremiah railed against the political intrigue in Jerusalem and royal alliances with Egypt against the Babylon. He was politically influential enough to escape a royal death sentence for his public critiques. Hence, he was imprisoned.

In jail, Jeremiah wrote these verses of hope. Yes, the kingdom would fall. Jerusalem would be left desolate. But these events would not stop God's plan to restore the nation and the royal line. In fact, the righteous king would be the source of national revival.

True to his vision, Jeremiah witnessed the

destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. But, Jeremiah would not live to see God's people return to their homeland. Nonetheless, his words gave the people hope. God would restore the royal line, the king would rule justly, and the nation would be renewed. This, however, would happen in God's time and in God's way.

*Q: How do you find hope in this season of hurry?*

### **Psalm: The Path of the Lord**

*Q: How smooth or rough has your spiritual path been over the past year?*

"No pain, no gain." This popular dictum from body building does resonate with spiritual growth. The smooth times in life seem to yield little; the tough times seem to see leaps in insight and spiritual maturity. By no means



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should we seek tough times, but we shouldn't shrink from them either. Facing the challenges of life does bring us closer to God.

Yet, "no pain, no gain" must be put into context. While we might see growth spurts in tough times, it is really the daily practice of faith that makes growth possible. Like a regular fitness routine, we must pray, study, and share faith on a daily basis and in a deliberate way. We can only realize growth by exercising our spiritual "muscles." We cannot expect to show spiritual strength only when challenges face us, then conveniently forget about feeding our spirit in the good times.

Psalm 25 made a subtle appeal for consistency in the spiritual life. For the psalmist, the path of the Lord was based on a consistent duty to God's Law. While much of the hymn asked God for relief, its center extolled the audience to remain faithful, for the path of the Lord had its own reward.

Psalm 25 is an unusual hymn. A quick reading reveals a theme of supplication. Yet, it is highly stylized, like wisdom literature. Nearly every line in the psalm begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet (two letters are missing while two letters are doubled). The psalm has a chiasmic or "A-B-A" overtones. The themes of 25:1-7 are loosely reflected in 25:11-21. "Wait for the LORD" is mentioned in 25:1 and 22, escape from shame and enemies in 25:2-3 and 25:19-21, follow the ways of YHWH and relief from troubles of the heart in 25:4-5, 16-18, and love and forgiveness in 25:6-7, 11-15. These steps lead to 25:8-10, where the psalmist praised the way of the YHWH (i.e., the Torah); the humble person who follows the Law walks the path of "faithful love" (enjoys the blessings of God).

The tone and structure of the psalm point to an

author who lived after the Babylonian exile. The spiritual themes are waiting and duty to the Law, not the triumphant songs of the monarchy in its glory. The psalmist asked the Lord for pardon, praised the wisdom of the Torah's lifestyle, and waited for the Lord to act in the life of the his people. These themes were present among Jews at the time of Jesus and were part of the spiritual groundwork for modern Judaism.

Psalm 25 presents us with a different tack on the spiritual life. As Christians, most of our spiritual focus is on the afterlife. Yet, God meant his life to be realized in the present. In other words, the struggle of the spiritual life has its own rewards in this realm. As we walk the path of the Lord, let us realize (and enjoy) his faithfulness and love, for he is with us now.

*Q: How do you feed your spirit every day?  
How have your efforts given you comfort,  
even in the tough times?*

### **Reading 2: Grow in Love**

In one of the earliest books in the New Testament canon, Paul wrote to the Church at Thessalonika between 50-54 A.D. At the time of letter, the city was a major seaport to the east of Greece proper. It was the seat of Roman administration with a diverse and prosperous population. The Church at Thessalonika was mixed between Gentile and Jew.

This letter revealed that despite a strong opposition from the Jewish synagogue, Paul had a strong affection for the community because they were steadfast in their faith. Nevertheless, after Paul explained his efforts to see those in the church, he exhorted them to live chaste lives. The verses in this study form the bridge between his explanation and his exhortation.



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These verses used a simple question to create this bridge: How should the Christian live? Paul's answer was as simple: love the way you have been shown to love. 3:12-13 was a prayer that the community grow in the love that Paul and his fellow missionaries showed the community. 4:1-2 remind the community to grow in the Christian life and devotion to God. This life and devotion were again found in love. Indeed, in these verses, Paul could reduce the tradition he claimed to receive from Christ himself in one simple word: love. Christian love is the basis for missionary work and morality.

May we grow in love for each other and in the Christian life, just as Paul wrote in prayer and encouragement.

*Q: How has your awareness of God's love grown? How has God's love for you changed you?*

### **Gospel: Great Anticipation**

*Q: What do you look forward to this Christmas? What do you dread this holiday season? Why?*

"Christmas is coming!" What is your reaction when those words come from the mouths of children? Do you see the joy of the season? Or do you see the red of mounting debt? (Honestly, most of us see both!)

Anticipation and anxiety over the holiday season go hand in hand. Sometimes we want to savor the season. Sometimes we just want the season to get over. Sometimes we anticipate. Sometimes we're anxious.

When Jesus pointed to his coming, he realized there would be anxiety. But he wanted

anticipation. He wanted his people to stand tall and raise their heads. He wanted them to have hope.

21:25-26 In these two verses, Jesus described the end times in symmetrical fashion. He began with the numerous signs in the entire sky, reflected events and reactions on earth, then returned to the shaking of the sky. In the time of Jesus, most people believed events in the night sky reflected coming events on earth (the night sky revealed the will of the gods). If there was trouble in an arena where people had no control (the sky), certainly trouble would follow on earth.

These two verses form three phrases in two sentences. "There will be . . ." covers both phrases in the first sentence (the phrase about the signs in the sky and the anguish of the nations). The second phrase was made independent for the sake intelligibility in English.

"on earth (there will be) anguish of nations, being at a loss over (to explain) the roaring of the sea and the (rolling of the) waves, while men faint from fear from fear and expectation of the (events) coming upon the (known) world." Violent storms at sea and on the coast would leave people disturbed about divine will and guessing about the future.

21:27 The subtle meaning of this sentence was explained in depth on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B (two weeks ago). Luke's verse paralleled Mark 13: 26. Both are based upon Daniel 7:13.

21:28 "straighten up and raise up your heads" The attitude of the Christian is the exact opposite of those in 21:26. The Christian is to stand proud and full of expectation, instead of "fainting from fear."



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"because your liberation is at hand" The liberation or redemption mentioned referred to the end of the world.

In these short verses, Jesus described the beginning of God's final initiative. He would give signs of warning across the sky, cause anxiety on earth with violent sea storms, and shake up the heavens. What we would explain scientifically as eclipses, meteor showers, and the result of storm systems on earth, the ancients attributed to God's intervention in the order of the cosmos. God would shake things up.

People would grow anxious because their faith systems and rituals failed. They could no longer control malevolent spirits that drove the sun, the moon, the stars, or the seas. Without the security their idols gave them, they would faint at the coming events. For these events would be unknown, chaotic, and devastating.

But, Christians were to rejoice; their Savior was at hand! Now, their world view and lifestyle would be vindicated, for Christians saw the world and lived in the world differently. Notice Luke implied the division between the believers and nonbelievers. Further, he implied, Christians had something to be delivered from: persecution. Finally, Luke presented a time of hope. Through great power and glory (i.e., reputation or "flash" in the popular translation above), the Son of Man would come and free his followers. Unlike the anxious people of the world, the Christians were to anticipate the end in hope.

21:35 "all (those) sitting on the face of the entire earth" "Sitting" in this sense is a Hebraism, meaning "living."

21:34c-35 Since "that day" is understood as the subject of the last clause in 21:34 and the

sentence in 21:35, "like a trap" is understood for both ("catch you" in 34c and "come upon all sitting on the entire earth" in 35).

21:36 "Stay awake every moment, (constantly) pleading" The phrase "every moment" is literally "in every moment." The phrase can refer to "staying awake" or to "pleading." By adding the word "constantly" to pleading, the translation recognizes both references ("stay awake every moment" and "every moment pleading").

"(constantly) pleading that to have the strength to pass safely through all these (events) about to happen, and to stand (with conviction) before the Son of Man" The verb "to plead" or "to pray" controlled two petitions: strength to endure the end times and the strength to take a stand as a Christian before the Son of Man. Both petitions depend upon strength of faith.

How was the Christian to anticipate the end? A simple profession of faith was not enough. For one could be Christian in name, but his or her heart could belong to the world, its deceptive delights, and its anxieties. Obviously, self-control was essential.

In Luke, Jesus added another condition: unceasing prayer. Unlike first century contemporaries, early Christians focused their prayer, not necessarily on present need, but upon future deliverance. They would pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus encouraged them to pray for a strength of faith that would enable them to weather the final days and stand before the judgment seat.

So, the Christian was to anticipate the end in two ways: a life of moral self control and prayer for future spiritual strength. Shouldn't we approach the holidays in the same way?



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### **Catechism Theme: The Coming of Christ (CCC 668-677)**

Christ Jesus rules now in heaven. He reveals his power and glory through us, his Church. He is present when we live with high moral standards and when we pray. He is present when we get out of the way and allow him to reveal his power, with us, through us.

But Jesus will come again. His appearance will be sudden and sure. Until that time, Christians will suffer from misunderstanding, hatred, and violence. The evil the world unleashes on the Church will not extinguish the flame of faith. The Church will be strengthened. And her influence will grow. For Christ is truly present with his Church in adversity.

*Q: How does prayer and self-control help you*

*anticipate the coming of Christ?*

Anxiety and anticipation do go together. They are two reactions to a life under pressure. But one sees only darkness and despair. The other sees light and hope.

We can never fully predict disastrous events, but we can prepare for them. We can live a high moral life, as if tomorrow does matter. And we can pray for the strength to live through the darker days. Ultimately we can live as if Jesus is fully present. We can live with hope fully present.

*Q: Choose one area in your life that makes you anxious. How can faith turn your anxiety in this area into anticipation? How can God give you hope?*