

ctkAlive! Scripture Reflection
First Sunday of Advent
2023—B Cycle Readings



What Do I See?

“If we are too busy to make space for prayerful reflection every day, we are too busy to be *human*, too busy to be *good*, too busy to *grow*, too busy to be *peaceful*.”

Sr. [Joan Chittister](#), OSB (Order of St. Benedict), states this spiritual truth quite bluntly in her *Bible Diary 2010* reflection

How does the above image speak to me of our culture of busyness?
When have I felt the same pressure of overwhelming busyness in my life?
How do I—or have I—deal(t) with busyness in my own life?

Image source: “[Busy](#)” by [Adam Edward Mayer](#)

Prayer at Lighting of the First Advent Candle
(abridged, and adapted for use here)



Come, Lord Jesus.
Excite in me a *wonder* at the wisdom and power
of your Father... and mine.
Excite in me a *hunger* for peace...
in the world... in our nation... within myself.
Excite in me a *desire* to serve you and others
with gladness and love.
Excite in me the kind of *joy*... *love*... and *peace*...
I hope to bring to the manger at Christmas.
I pray this in your name, Lord Jesus
whose advent I welcome. Amen.

Adapted from: Catholic Forum (no longer available online)
Image of Advent candle courtesy of [Kyle William Urban](#) on [unsplash.com](#)

Scripture Readings

Book of the Prophet Isaiah 63: 16-17, 19 and 64: 2-7 “Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways!”

Psalm 80: 2-3, 15-16, 18-19 “May your help be with the man of your right hand; with the son of man whom you make strong.”

I Corinthians 1: 3-9 “I give thanks to my God always on your account....”

Mark 13: 33-37 “Be watchful! Be alert!”

Introduction to the First Sunday of Advent

A *pregnancy theme* dominates the season of Advent. Mary's accepting, carrying, and nurturing Jesus energizes the spirit of these four weeks. How can we—both men and women—relate to the Advent mystery of inner silence and unseen growth? Our own poetic expressions give us a clue: “pregnant with anticipation,” “expecting the approaching unknown,” etc. To make sense of Advent, we must tap into that part of our daily lives where we “wait,” “anticipate,” “expect,” “hope.”

There was a first Christmas only because of Mary's patient but active pregnancy, her personal Advent season of waiting. There can be no *meaningful* Christmas for us without a conscious, reflective Advent preparation.

Our Christian tradition invites us to spend the next four weeks in conscious, reflective preparation for the coming of Christ... again.

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (63: 16-17, 19 & 64: 2-7)

“You are our father, though Abraham does not know us
and Israel does not recognize us. You, Lord, are our father;
you have been called our protector from ancient times.
Why, Lord, do you make us stray from your ways,
and make our minds stubborn so that we do not obey you?
Return for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your inheritance!
“We existed from ancient times, but you did not rule over them,
they were not your subjects.

“As when fire ignites dry wood, or fire makes water boil,
let your adversaries know who you are,
and may the nations shake at your presence!
When you performed awesome deeds that took us by surprise,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.
Since ancient times no one has heard or perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,

who intervenes for those who wait for him....

"You assist those who delight in doing what is right,
who observe your commandments.

Look, you were angry because we violated them continually.
How then can we be saved?

We are all like one who is unclean,
all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight.
We all wither like a leaf; our sins carry us away like the wind....

"No one invokes your name or makes an effort to take hold of you.
For you have rejected us and handed us over to our own sins."

Personal Reflection

This blunt and earthy passage, written by an unknown prophet, rightly belongs among the last of the three distinct sections of the Book of Isaiah. It dates from the time of Israel's defeat and enslavement by Babylon's mighty King Nebuchadnezzar (ca. 780 BC/BCE).

The author painted a bleak picture of Israel's corrupted condition, which made it vulnerable to defeat and enslavement. Still, he highlighted the slaves' unwavering faith and hope that Yahweh would have the last word and—*once again*—save his people (which happened 70 years later, after many original exiles had died in captivity).

— *How does the prophet's portrayal of Yahweh compare with my own image of God? (Keep in mind the historical context of this passage.)*

— *How confident am I that our God is still in charge of me and the world? And that God will be with those who "keep the faith," as the author declares?*

— *In our badly divided world and homeland, where do I find strength and hope to persevere as a Christian committed to living and modeling the Christ-life in my attitudes and behavior?*

Responsorial: Psalm 80 (2-3, 15-16, 18-19)

A plea for the return of God's favor

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

In the sight of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh
reveal your power!
Come and deliver us!
O God, restore us! Smile on us!

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

Take care of this vine,
the root your right hand planted,
the shoot you made to grow!
It is burned and cut down.

They die because you are displeased with them.
*Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face,
and we shall be saved.*

Then... we will not turn away from you.
Revive us and we will pray to you!
O Lord God, invincible warrior, restore us!
Smile on us! Then we will be delivered!
*Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face,
and we shall be saved.*

(If you have access to "Alexa" or another such playback devise, say, "Play Psalm 80 by [Sons of Korah](#)." Or listen to it on [YouTube](#).)

Who was [Korah](#)?

Personal Reflection

Without actually using the term "shepherd," this psalm speaks of Yahweh as watchful and conscientious caretaker—caring, restoring, and yes even smiling over his beloved vineyard (meaning here his people, Israel).

— *How firm is my conviction that "Yahweh of hosts" has time and interest to nurture and care for me personally?*

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

— *Who in my life reflects the "face" of our loving God, especially during my hard times? How does this person help me "stay positive" and persevere on the paths of faith and hope?*

A Reading from the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (1: 3-9)

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. For you were made rich in every way in him, in all your speech and in every kind of knowledge, just as the testimony about Christ has been confirmed among you, so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be

blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Personal Reflection

In Corinth at the time Paul wrote this letter, there existed a dynamic community of baptized Greek and Jewish converts. As often happens within dynamic faith communities, the enthusiasm of some believers had begun to wear off. Divisions arose and threatened their unity. Some members even leaned toward returning to the vices of their former lives. The community’s leaders found themselves incapable of dealing with members’ internal divisions and doubts about their new faith. They called upon Paul, their founder, to come back and rescue them. Paul decided instead to write this letter because, at the time, he could not interrupt his work among the newer community at Ephesus.

— *How firm is my conviction that “Yahweh of hosts” has time and interest to nurture and care for me personally? What signs of this divine availability have I experienced firsthand?*

The Gospel According to Mark (13: 33-37)

“Watch out! Stay alert! For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert.

“Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return—whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn—or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly. What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!”

Personal Reflection

“Watch out! Stay alert!” [Mary Ellen Sperry](#) suggests that we consider that “since we don’t know the day of Jesus’ coming, start living as if the day is today” (*Bible Diary 2023*).

Jesus’ cautionary words to his disciples and listeners have a familiar ring to parents of pre-teens and teenagers. Wise parents know where the social traps lie, those tempting hazards that can send young people spinning into a downward spiral with all its negative consequences and threats to the life God desires for them.

But not young people only. We all have our dark alleys that tempt us to test their transparent “goodies.” Jesus knows where our hazards lie and stands ready to guide us through the tempting hazards of that “other life” we sometimes find more appealing. As Christians, we know we do not walk through life’s hazards alone. That’s why we call him “Savior.”

“I give thanks, constantly to my God, for you, and for the grace of God given to you, in Christ Jesus.”

- *What occurred within me or around me during this past week that inspired me to give thanks to my Protector and Guide?*
- *When in my life did I almost forget that God loves me passionately and takes care of me? Has it occurred in a time of great joy and success? Or in a hard time of personal illness/injury or family tragedy?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening, Reading Watch

Bishop Robert Barron, [The Advent Revolution](#) (11 min.)

Listen

[O Come, O Come, Emmanuel](#) from [La Sierra University](#), Riverside, CA

The university's music students recorded this beautiful hymn as a gift to all who love Christmas music.

Read

[The Reed of God](#) by [Caryll Houselander](#)

First published in 1944, this acclaimed spiritual classic awaits rediscovery by a new generation of readers. Houselander's profound meditation depicts Mary's intimately human side as she ponders then accepts her role as a hollow (unclogged) reed waiting for God's music to play through her.

(One of my personal all-time favorites—AJG)

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings...

What does the Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding... (1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships... and (2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 “Prepare the way of the Lord!”

Psalm 85: 9-14 “The Lord himself will give his benefits”

2 Peter 3: 8-14 “In the Lord's eyes, one day is as a thousand years.

Mark 1: 1-8 “One more powerful than I is to come after me.

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

works... never has. Even the ancient writers of the creation story in Genesis 1: 1 ("In the

The Slow Work of God

Above all,

trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient...

to reach the end without delay.

We would like to skip

the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way

to something unknown...

to something new.

And yet... it is the law of all progress...

that it is made by passing through

some stages of instability—

and that it may take...

a very long time.

Source: [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#), S.J. (1881-1957)

Gender usage in these reflections: We are conscious of gender references to God in Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

Note: Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)

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