

First Sunday of Advent, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 07/17/2013 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalms 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

One feels the edge of tension and excitement in all the readings today, but nowhere more than in the Gospel. Here, on the first Sunday of the liturgical year, we are called to attention, to alertness, to vigilance—not for the first coming of Christ in the weakness and vulnerability of a human child, but for the second coming of Christ, in judgment and in glory. How unflattering a comparison it seems at first sight: as householders watch out for thieves, who may rob them at any time without notice, so we must watch out for the return of our Lord! How frightening the notion of a coming as sudden and devastating as the flood in Noah's time! Yet these are images typical of Christian apocalyptic literature, meant to stress the unexpected nature of the Lord's return and our need for attentiveness to the ultimate end of human history: Christ.

The Gospel writer is making a comparison that definitely involves an element of trepidation. No domesticated God here. No smug and self-satisfied people who rest assured of their own salvation. Rather, Matthew unsettles us with the possibility that we may not have everything "all sewn up" with God. To human eyes one man plowing a field looks much like another. One woman milling wheat looks much like another. But to God, who knows how each appears? "One will be taken and one will be left." The implicit question to the hearer of this word is: Which would you like to be? The passage puts us on edge. It calls for decision. If we would like to be ready to meet the Lord when he comes, we must begin now to get ready. We must stay alert. This is a strong Advent theme, which persists throughout the season.

The first reading, from Isaiah, uses a very old image of the nations coming together to God on a mountain to describe in eschatological terms the final fulfillment of the hopes of Israel. The passage tells us that not just Israel but all peoples will be drawn to God, whose teaching, the Torah, will bring about both judgment (understanding, wisdom) and true peace. The word for peace here, shalom, suggests complete well-being, the wholeness of life with God, and is an element of the

name of Jerusalem. The passage belongs to the early career of first Isaiah, whose prophecies began before the Assyrian invasion and were oriented toward the moral and spiritual reform of the people.

His glorious vision of God-given peace descending on all nations and resulting in weapons being turned into farm equipment is truly an amazing word. For us, its liturgical proclamation on this Advent Sunday is especially poignant as an invitation to “Come . . . climb the Lord’s mountain” today. We—the nations brought into peace with God through Christ—continue to yearn for the ultimate fullness of peace promised by God’s Word.

Catholic Doctrine

The Second Coming of Christ

The very idea of a second coming—or, for that matter, a first coming—of Christ depends on a sense of time, that is, the progression of one moment to the next and a “before, during, and after” to people’s lives. The Bible itself begins and ends with references to time (the statement “In the beginning . . .” of Genesis 1:1 and the prayerful cry, “Come, Lord Jesus” of Revelation 22:20). The starting and ending points of sacred scripture are the God who creates time (and yet who stands outside of time and is eternal) and the expectant hope of believers who long for the return of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead.

As the season of Advent opens, the Catholic Church looks toward the end of historical time, in which all the moments from the beginning of creation to its fulfillment are achieved in the reign of Christ. This forward-looking stance gives meaning to all the days and years of individual believers and to the life of the whole community of the faithful as celebrated in the liturgical cycle.

The realization that there will be a certain end which includes judgment—that how we behave here and now has consequences in the hereafter—gives a definite purpose not only to each person’s history but to the history of the world. Since that moment in time when Christ ascended in glory to the right hand of God, the world has been on the verge of his imminent return. While no one knows the day or the hour, it is coming soon—so much so that the Church characterizes these days as the final hour of the history of the world (CCC 673).

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