

FIRST READING – A ADVENT 1

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw
concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.
Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.
O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Isaiah = Eye-ZAY-uh

or

Isaiah = Eye-ZIGH-uh

Amoz = AY-mahz

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds

then look up at the people

and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – A ADVENT 1

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters,
you know what time it is,
how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.
For salvation is nearer to us now
than when we became believers;
the night is far gone, the day is near.
Let us then lay aside the works of darkness
and put on the armour of light;
let us live honourably as in the day,
not in revelling and drunkenness,
not in debauchery and licentiousness,
not in quarrelling and jealousy.
Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

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PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A ADVENT 1

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus spoke to his disciples:

“As the days of Noah were,
so will be the coming of the Son of Man.
For as in those days before the flood
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
until the day Noah entered the ark,
and they knew nothing
until the flood came and swept them all away,
so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.
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.
Keep awake therefore,
for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
But understand this:
if the owner of the house had known
in what part of the night the thief was coming,
he would have stayed awake
and would not have let his house be broken into.
Therefore you also must be ready,
for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 2:1-5

This is a vision of the pilgrimage of all the nations to Zion to be taught the ways of YHWH. YHWH will arbitrate international disputes, and a universal peace will follow. The prophecy is reproduced almost verbatim in Mic 4.

It is uncertain whether Micah lifted it from Isaiah or Isaiah from Micah, or whether both derived it from a common source. Scholars seem to favor the third possibility. It certainly looks like an ancient liturgical fragment.

It is important to notice two things about this vision. It is speaking about what will happen at the end of history—in other words, it is eschatological. It is not envisaged as a possibility within history. Holy Scripture does not permit us to indulge in the illusion that a time will come within history when there will be no more wars.

This does not, of course, mean that we should not work to eliminate the causes of war or to avert or bring to an end particular wars. It only means that we should not cherish extravagant hopes that are doomed to inevitable disappointment. The final abolition of war will be possible only when God's purpose has triumphed in the consummation of history.

The second point to notice about the vision is that it is only when the nations have been taught God's ways and walk in God's paths that they will beat their swords into plowshares and live at peace with one another. "It is a beautiful vision; but, be it noted, peace rests in no human program, but in obedience to the divine law" (J. Bright in Peake's Commentary on the Bible).

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

The responsorial psalm takes up certain points from the first reading—the pilgrimage to Zion and the ensuing peace. This psalm was sung by the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem for the festivals. The first part expresses the pilgrims' excitement as they arrive within the sacred precincts. They exult in the unity that Jerusalem symbolizes as the festal crowds, representing all the tribes, flow together to the temple of YHWH.

In some strands of postexilic Judaism, it became part of the eschatological hope to envisage a day when the nations would flow together to Jerusalem (e.g., Isa 25:6). The New Testament sees this hope partially fulfilled in the admission of the Gentiles into the Church, and completely realized in the final coming of Christ.

See especially Rom 9-11, where the Apostle Paul develops the thought that in bringing the collection from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem, he is symbolizing the partial fulfillment of this hope, and propounds the conviction that his mission will contribute decisively to the final fulfillment, when the fullness of the Gentiles will be gathered in and all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25-26).

Reading II: Romans 13:11-14

This is the traditional reading for the first Sunday of Advent. It is full of great New Testament eschatological words: night/day, darkness/light, sleep/wake, hour and full time.

This language presupposes the early Christian scheme of the two ages—this present evil age and the new age soon to dawn. It interprets Christian existence as a life of tension.

It is lived within this present old age but is already determined by the new age that is soon to come. Christians stand in the dark with their faces lit by the coming dawn.

They can therefore already cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. They can live “as in the day,” although actually they are still in the night.

Note that it is not by their own unaided effort that the believers are to conduct themselves becomingly as in the day, but rather by “putting on the Lord Jesus.”

In Gal 3:27 the same phrase is associated with baptism: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Hence, in our present passage Paul is exhorting Christians to live out the implications of their baptism, in the power that their baptismal status gives.

One final problem. Paul tells his readers that our “salvation” is nearer than when we first believed, that is, nearer than it was when we first became Christians.

By “salvation” Paul is not thinking of salvation in an individualistic, pietistic sense, as though we were now nearer to our death and therefore to heaven. He means the great day of salvation, the consummation at the end of history.

Like all the early Christians, the Apostle believed that this end was to come very shortly—so soon, in fact, that it was now appreciably nearer than when the Romans first became Christians. Paul was clearly mistaken as to the date, for we are still here today and the consummation has not come yet.

Perhaps an answer can be sought along these lines: the Christian always has to live as though the final consummation were just around the corner, in the certainty of it, a certainty so strong that already the light of the new age is casting its ray upon the Christian’s present existence.

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44

This passage is from Matthew’s version of the so-called Synoptic apocalypse (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21). Like other contemporary Jewish apocalypses, the Synoptic apocalypse relates

a series of catastrophes identifiable with historical events that preceded the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E.

These events are to usher in the final consummation—the return of the Son of Man, the Last Judgment, and the new heaven and the new earth.

Such an apocalyptic scheme creates an overall impression that conflicts with the general tenor of Jesus' teaching elsewhere, including this present passage, which Matthew has inserted from his sayings source into the Synoptic apocalypse.

Here, in sayings that have the freshness of authentic Jesus material, the end is depicted, not as something that is preceded by a carefully planned apocalyptic timetable, but as something that is to come suddenly, like the flood in Noah's day: "they knew nothing until the flood came Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

This coming of the Son of Man will be accompanied by the ultimate separation of the saved and the lost. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other left. One will be saved, the other rejected. Therefore, watch as a householder must watch for the thief.

There can be no doubt that sayings like this, rather than the Synoptic apocalypse as a whole, correctly reproduce the eschatological message of Jesus.

But this brings us face to face with the same problem as in the Pauline passage, though here it is Jesus rather than the early church that was apparently mistaken about the date of the end. It did not come soon.

Once again, we can take the apocalyptic perspective as an expression of the eternal consequences of the choice with which Jesus confronts his hearers. They must certainly react as though the end were just around the corner.

Joachim Jeremias has made a further bold and exciting suggestion: Jesus does not regard the will of God as fixed and immutable. God can shorten the days for the sake of the elect (Mk 13:20), and he can also lengthen the period of grace (Lk 13:6-9) as a free act of mercy.

Reginald H. Fuller