

## FIRST READING – B ADVENT 1

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

You, O Lord, are our father;  
“Our Redeemer from of old” is your name.  
Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways  
and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?  
Turn back for the sake of your servants,  
for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.  
O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence.  
When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.  
You meet those who gladly do right,  
those who remember you in your ways.  
But you were angry, and we sinned;  
because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our good deeds are like a filthy cloth.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
There is no one who calls on your name,  
or attempts to take hold of you;  
for you have hidden your face from us,  
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.  
Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.



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

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – B ADVENT 1

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you  
because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,  
for in every way you have been enriched in him,  
in speech and knowledge of every kind -  
just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you -  
so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift  
as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
He will also strengthen you to the end,  
so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
God is faithful;  
by him you were called  
into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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



The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – B ADVENT 1

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Beware, keep alert;  
for you do not know when the time will come.  
It is like a man going on a journey,  
when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge,  
each with a particular task,  
and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.  
Therefore, keep awake –  
for you do not know when the master of the house will come,  
in the evening, or at midnight,  
or at cockcrow, or at dawn,  
or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.  
And what I say to you I say to all:  
Keep awake.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

In series B the Gospel readings are taken from the Gospel of Mark, supplemented by the Gospel of John. This is necessary because Mark's Gospel, being the shortest, requires supplementing. Also, in the three-year cycle, John is otherwise read only on certain occasions (especially Lent and Eastertide) in series A and C.

Let us first remind ourselves of the structure of the Advent season. The theme of future eschatology—the Christian hope for the final consummation of history—dominates the concluding Sundays of the year and reaches its climax on the first Sunday of Advent.

On the following three Sundays, other themes preparatory to the celebration of Christmas and the first coming of the Messiah gradually take over. Thus, each succeeding liturgical season dovetails into its predecessor.

### Reading I: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

This passage is a selection of verses from the psalm of lament covering Is 63:7-64:11. It has been described as “one of the jewels of the Bible” (Jerome Biblical Commentary). The exiles had returned from Babylon with high hopes enkindled by Second Isaiah's prophecies. But then nothing seemed to happen. The Temple still lay in ruins:

Our holy and beautiful house,  
where our ancestors praised you,  
has been burned by fire,  
and all our pleasant places have become ruins (Is 64:11).

This is the historical context of the lament. The psalmist confesses his sins and the sins of his nation, which he sees to be the cause of the delay in the restoration of Jerusalem: “all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.” He thus anticipates Paul's insight that every person's virtues are tainted with sin. The prophet cries out (see Is 64:1) for God to intervene:

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake at your presence!

These words were undoubtedly in the mind of the earliest evangelist when he recorded the story of Jesus' baptism. Mk 1:10 states that the heavens were “torn apart” (a word that the RSV unfortunately obscured by translating it “were opened,” thus assimilating it to the other Synoptics and missing the point).

This cry for divine intervention has long been associated with Advent. Many will remember that it provided the Introit for the fourth Sunday of Advent. *Rorate coeli desuper* was one of those Latin tags that everyone knew in the Middle Ages.

Though we see, with Mark, the fulfillment of the psalmist's prayer in the Christ event, the church still looks for a final rending of the heavens when the Son of Man will come again. Indeed, the church experiences a rending of the heavens in each liturgy, when Christ comes down in his sacrament to visit the people in their need.

### **Responsorial Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19\***

This psalm is a community lament, similar to the first reading, and thus a fitting response to it. As the refrain shows, it too is a cry for divine intervention.

In the last stanza, “man” and “son of man” stand in synonymous parallelism, common in Hebrew poetry. Both lines of the stanza are a petition for God to come to the aid of his human creation. But the man in question is the king of Israel (“man of thy right hand”), for the king is the ideal embodiment and representative of humanity.

Although there is no direct connection between this figure and the Davidic Son of man, it is possible to give the verse a Christological interpretation, since passages referring to the earthly king of Israel may be transferred to the messianic king.

In that case, “man of thy right hand” and “Son of man” become references to Christ, and the stanza becomes a petition for God to intervene by sending his Messiah. That would make the psalm particularly appropriate for Advent.

### **Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

This reading is the opening blessing and thanksgiving of 1 Corinthians (actually this was not the first letter that Paul wrote to that community, for he tells us in 1 Cor 5:9 that he had written them a previous one). The thanksgiving is something of a *captatio benevolentiae*.

Paul thanks God for the variety of charismatic gifts that have been manifested in the Corinthian community—their speech and knowledge (*gnosis*)—but later on he will have much to say in criticism of the way they are using these gifts, though never for a moment does Paul doubt that in themselves they are genuine gifts of God.

Note how Paul immediately sets the charismatic gifts in an eschatological context. He reminds the Corinthians that in spite of all their present knowledge, they are still waiting for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ. They need to be sustained by him to the end and to be preserved guiltless in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here are three reminders of the “not yet,” which the Corinthian charismatics were so much in danger of forgetting in their intoxication with the gifts they already had. It is these reminders that make this passage appropriate for Advent.

Paul's substantive criticism of the Corinthians' use or misuse of the charismatic gifts will be developed later in the letter, especially in 1 Cor 12 and 14, which may be regarded as

an unfolding of the implications of the eschatological pointers in the opening thanksgiving.

### **Gospel: Mark 13:33-37**

As in the other years of the three-year cycle, the requirements of the first Sunday of Advent make it necessary to begin the gospel readings, not with the opening of each Gospel, but with the future-eschatological material in the Synoptic apocalypse. This apocalypse in all three Synoptics concludes with a series of eschatological parables. Today's reading is one of these—the parable of the doorkeeper.

This parable has a long and complicated history in the Synoptic tradition and, as it stands in Mark, has acquired secondary features, as comparison with the Lucan form (Lk 12:35-38) will show. These secondary features are: (1) “a man going on a journey”—a phrase taken from the parable of the talents; (2) “puts his slaves in charge, each with his work” — a phrase taken from the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants (Mt 24:45 and Lk 12:42).

The insertion of (1) applies the parable clearly to the departure of Christ at his ascension and identifies his return with the parousia. The second feature (2) applies the parable to the whole Christian community.

It thus becomes a parable of the post-Easter church waiting for the delayed parousia. It is also likely that the fourfold division of the day (evening, midnight, cockcrow, morning) is an accommodation to Roman usage, replacing the Palestinian division of the first, second, and third watches.

The original parable as told by Jesus will therefore be something like this: “A man goes out [for a dinner party] during the evening and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch so that when he comes back and knocks on the door, he may open it at once and let him in.”

The parable concludes with an exhortation: “Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn.”

We cannot be certain exactly what the original application of the parable was on the lips of Jesus. Joachim Jeremias thinks that it was probably addressed to the religious leaders of Israel, the scribes. But it could just as well have been addressed to Jesus' disciples or to the crowd.

In any case, it was originally a warning to be prepared for the final eschatological crisis which, as Jesus saw it, was soon to overtake his people as a result of his ministry. “It was not spoken to prepare the disciples for a long . . . period of waiting for the second coming, but to enforce the necessity for alertness in a crisis now upon them” (Dodd).

The Church had to adapt this parable to the post-Easter situation. Now there was not one final crisis but a phased process: the ascension of Jesus, his waiting in heaven, and his final return. The exhortation to watchfulness is now applied to the waiting Church, and a series of fresh allegorical touches is added to the original parable in its various forms.

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