

First Sunday of Advent

[Reading I: Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1, 3b-8](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 80:1ac, 2b, 14-15, 17-18](#)

[Reading II: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9](#)

[Gospel: Mark 13:33-37](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120323.cfm>



The church begins a new liturgical year today and we begin the season of Advent. With this new year, we begin reading the Gospel of Mark on most of the Sundays. Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and the readings are supplemented with selections from John and Luke. During special seasons, like Advent, the readings all focus on the themes of the season rather than the second reading being on its own cycle as is found in Ordinary Time.

The season of Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Sometimes it is four full weeks and sometimes only three weeks and a fourth Sunday. Advent comes from the Latin, Ad – to and vente, come. It is about coming, how Christ comes to us. The opening week focuses on how Christ will come again at the end of our lives and the end of the world. The middle part of Advent calls our attention to how God comes to us each day in all our everyday activities and relationships. The final days of Advent, (Dec 17 through Dec 24), focus on Christ's historical coming through his birth in Bethlehem. In all of this, we are called to greater awareness of Christ who is active in our lives. Various practices have developed over time to bring awareness and focus. There is the Advent wreath, calendar, chain, and the Jesse tree that introduces the various ancestors of Jesus.

The Gospel passage from Mark follows Jesus' comments on the destruction of the temple. The disciples want to know when this will occur. Jesus declares that only the heavenly Father knows. The disciples must be alert and attentive and not give up when hardship comes. The conversation then shifts to apocalyptic imagery and the end of the world. Jesus then presents the story of the homeowner who leaves his servants in charge. They do not know when he will return but they must fulfill their duties until the owner returns. So, it is with the disciples. They are not to become complacent but stay attentive to the duties that God has given them.

While many experiences can discourage us in life, like an international crisis, economic concerns, job insecurity, or illness, Jesus calls us to not be lost in these events and give up hope. Jesus will ultimately be victorious, and we come again as our savior. It may be in a new event; it may be at the moment of death; or it may be at the end of the world. We do not know when or how. Jesus will be faithful and be our savior.

The reading from Isaiah comes from the time of the return from the Babylonian captivity. The prophet is expressing his sense of God's absence and the desire for God to act in a mighty way that will turn people back to God. They have been in exile for 50 or more years and feel like God is paying no attention. We may have some of the same feelings and desire for God to come and do something now in our lives. This need for God is felt in every age and in every year whether it be in times of disease, in economic distress, in war, or in natural disasters. Someone is always feeling that God is absent and not listening. Even if we are

not feeling particularly abandoned, we can be more aware of those who are, whether they are in an ICU unit, alone in a strange city, children separated from their parents, those left homeless by wildfires or hurricanes, or refugees of war and violence.

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians using a standard format with a blessing and a thanksgiving. He points out that they have experienced God breaking into their lives, particularly in the spiritual gifts that are present in the community. He also warns them not to be focused on these gifts and experiences but on Jesus who will be the fulfillment when he returns. This passage was written in the fifties and like other early Christians they were awaiting Christ's return. He affirms again that Jesus will be faithful and thus to be alert and attentive.

We too are called to this same attentiveness and live for Christ today. It is not about worrying about the future or being caught in the past. Today is the only moment that we have. We are called to fulfill our responsibilities as family members, spouses, parents, workers, and community members. It is today that we respond to God. Our challenge is to stay awake, stay attentive, and be ready to welcome Christ as he comes to us each day. Jesus declares "Watch" so that we recognize the multitude of signs of God's presence and work in our midst.

Themes:

Advent season

God's initiative

Virtue of Hope

Christ's coming into our lives

Discussion Questions:

How do you become complacent and lose focus in your discipleship?

When have you felt that God has abandoned you?

How have you recognized God's action and presence in your life?

Have any good and holy things distracted you from God?

What are some practices or experiences that help you remember that God is in your life?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may be awake to life each day, roused from sleep-waking through life, and freed from avoidance of issues

For God's saving action: that God will rend the heavens and bring justice to the earth, freedom for all who are unjustly held or caught in addictions, and hope to those who feel defeated

For patience during this Advent season for each of us: that we may discover God's word in every sound that touches our ears, God's touch in every human embrace, and God's love in every gesture of self-sacrifice among us

For greater attentiveness: that our minds and hearts may be focused upon the tasks we do, the people we love, and the God whom we serve today

For greater awareness: that the Spirit will guide us to reflection and recognition of all the thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams that are planted deep within our hearts