

First Sunday Advent 2022

Readings from Matthew 24:37-44

In this section of Matthew's gospel at the beginning of chapter 24, we read the headings: *Destruction of the Temple Foretold, Beginning of Calamities, The Great Tribulation, Coming of the Son of Man, Unknown Day and Hour.* In fact, the last title is for today's gospel. These titles sound like the gospel readings we just left in the last years liturgical readings. And they are! We end one cycle and we begin another, but that doesn't mean we have forgotten what all came behind us.

We begin the celebration of Jesus' birth with the reading of Advent, to remind us that it is not all over, but a continuation of the cycle of readings that hopefully lead us to our salvation. We are not caught in a circle, but in a spiral that leads us deeper and deeper into our relationship with the Lord through others. The only thing that keeps us from getting stuck in a continuous repeat of former years, that is, getting stuck in a circle of repeats, is that hopefully we put into practice what we have lived through our interactions with others and with the world. I guess some would call that evangelization, especially when our interactions are with others.

The theme or phrase that stands out in today's reading is, "Be prepared...You do not know the day when the Lord will come!" Notice, the readings do not talk about a baby, even though we know that day of celebration will come. There is no mention of Jesus' birth nor mention of celebrating his birth. In the early Church, the celebration of Jesus' birth did not come until the 4th century! Advent wasn't added until the 6th century, and even then, it was celebrated as a minor Lent, a time for prayer and fasting!! The creche was added by Saint Francis with live animals in the 13th century!!! The Germans added the Christmas Tree, since it was ever green, a symbol the resurrection or eternal life. The pagan practice was to decorate it with candles, one can imagine the fire hazard, but the practice was to honor their **sun god** at the **winter solstice** when the days were beginning to get longer. They were quite aware of the seasons since they were mainly farmers.

Be prepared! How do we prepare? John the Baptist will show us a way. Jesus tells us to stay awake, do not be caught off guard. But how do we prepare ourselves so as to not be caught off guard? The readings in our new Church

Year cycle A help us to prepare, but not by reading them again as another repeat, but hopefully finding something new that will prepare us in this life. I try to prepare a homily each Sunday looking for something new but also relevant to our time in which we live. I also look to other homilists and try to find different voices, even women voices. This wonderful new book that I was gifted with mentions Jamie Phelps, a Dominican sister from Michigan. I noticed that even our Marianist sister, Nicole Trahan is featured in a homily.

Sister Jamie Phelps begins with admonishing us to stay awake, calling us to be attentive to what is happening in our place and in our times, aware of all the division in the world and church today. She encourages us to reflect in our lives the same unity/diversity that characterizes God through his unconditional love for us. In *Give Us This Day* Fr. Timothy Radcliffe writes about the word "**woke**," a term derived from the civil rights movement, meaning to be alert to the hidden prejudices that haunt our language and shape how we see the world. He also reminds us that to be "**awake**" as a Christian means, in the words of Isaiah, to "walk in the light of the Lord." We become alert to the tiniest hints of the divine presence.

Last, I want to introduce Pope Francis' encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, ***Joy of the Gospel***. I am pleased to be able to offer classes on scripture with the goal to make them exciting enough to pick up and read, maybe not from cover to cover. Even as a teacher I directed my students which books to read and in what order. As we begin this New Church Liturgical Year, the readings are not necessarily new, but as I mentioned earlier, I always find something new to reflect and talk about. This year is not different, especially if you want these scripture passages to bring us closer to the Lord.

Francis mentions that embracing the gift of friendship with Jesus is the joy of the gospel. Feasting on the Word of God must be our steady diet, since the words of Jesus are ***spirit and life***, John 6:63. The disciples, formed as servant of the Word, propose Jesus' friendship to their brothers and sisters. The eucharist confirms the disciple in a strong desire to preach the gospel to form a more just society. The Eucharist is not solely for our own nourishment, it feeds me so that I may feed others.

The Church is not a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few. We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port, he writes! To say, Yes, this year to the gospel is to say "Yes" to Christ, a relationship. The joy from the gospel is solidarity and encounter, "To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us. It is easy to rely on computer

screens for our satisfaction and the immediate sense of control they offer. The gospel calls for face-to-face encounters with people, their pain and joys, which can be life-giving for us as well.

"True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness." EG 88