

1 Advent Year B Readings and Commentary

Summary By [Dale J. Sieverding](#): The Gospel today comes from the apocalyptic genre speaking of the end times and the necessity of being alert and ready. In mentioning the four hours of the night watch, we are given a foreshadowing of the passion narrative trial which will take place on the same timetable. Mark has no elaborate last judgment scene like Matthew, so this passage advises the disciples and by extension the Christian community hearing this proclaimed to always be alert and ready. If Mark was written for a community under persecution, this passage is all the more pointed in telling them to be ready to give witness and testify to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God.

The passage from Isaiah is almost like a psalm. It recalls God's saving deeds in the past, recognizes the sin of Israel and ends with a plea for mercy. The prophet Isaiah in despair pleads, "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..." Israel's experience of difficulty is interpreted by the prophet as evidence of God's anger at a sinful people. The final words are prescient in asking God to work with the people as a potter forms clay. Psalm 80 is a hymn of lament calling upon God's power to save the people of Israel. The passage from First Corinthians speaks of the steadfastness of faith with which God will keep his people. © 2008, OCP. All rights reserved.

First Reading Isaiah 63:16b-17b, 19b; 64:2-7
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

You, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named forever.
Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways,
and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
with the mountains quaking before you,
while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for,
such as they had not heard of from of old.
No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you
doing such deeds for those who wait for him.
Would that you might meet us doing right,
that we were mindful of you in our ways!
Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful;
all of us have become like unclean people,
all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
we have all withered like leaves,
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.
There is none who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to cling to you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the work of your hands.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary: Isaiah 63:16b-17b, 19b; 64:2-7: By Deacon Owen Cummings: On this first Sunday of Advent, the reading from Isaiah invites us to take stock of ourselves in relation to God. The passage is about identities, God's and ours. God's identity is made clear. Twice, both at the beginning and at the end of our passage he is addressed as "our Father." Here is no distant deity but a God who is close to us, and concerned about us like any good parent. But as father God is also our Creator. He is the potter and we are the clay, the work of his hands, echoing perhaps Gen. 2:7. Our human identity is also made clear: we are sinful, unclean, like withered leaves on a tree. This sad and sorry description of humankind should not be seen in an absolutely negative way. This is an honest description of how we often are, despite our best intentions and aspirations. We constantly fall short of who and what we are. The prophet momentarily seems to wish for a repeat of the great events of Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you." Even as sinful, we would almost necessarily respond to such a dramatic appearance of God. And yet, in his closing words he appears to move away from this desire for some grand divine intervention. Because we are the work of the Divine Potter's hands, the suggestion is that God is not finished with us, that we are works in progress. If we are works in progress, there is no room for despair and total disappointment for our failures to be fully human. Rather, there is room for our Father to shape us, to mold us, to energize us, to breathe his Holy Breath into us so that we may be more fully alive. A good reading with which to begin the holy season of Advent, as we reflect on how God's creative work in us is progressing. © 2005, OCP. All rights reserved.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

R(4) Lord make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted,
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.
Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

Commentary Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: God, the SHEPHERD, gives STRENGTH and new LIFE.

This psalm accompanies today's first reading from the prophet Micah, which expresses God's promise of the birth of a messianic ruler who "shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord." In the biblical tradition the image of the shepherd was commonly used for kings, rulers, and leaders. Christians see this promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the focus of this Fourth Sunday of Advent (see the Gospel). For us Christians, then, the psalm today invokes Jesus as the "shepherd of Israel," to rouse his power "and come to save us."

Although in its original context the psalm refers twice to the people of Israel as "the son of man whom you yourself made strong." We Christians can see this as applied to Jesus as the Son of Man whom God has made strong to be the new, messianic shepherd who rules and guides us. This too corresponds to the first reading from Micah: The ruler to be born will "shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord." The psalm prays for God to "give us new life, and we will call upon your name." It is Jesus, our strong shepherd, who leads us to new life--eternal life. Let us call upon his name and turn to him to be saved through this new life. © 2003, OCP. All rights reserved.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

We wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Brothers and sisters:

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

I give thanks to my God always on your account
for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus,
that in him you were enriched in every way,
with all discourse and all knowledge,
as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you,
so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift
as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He will keep you firm to the end,
irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is faithful,
and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 by Deacon Owen Cummings: Undoubtedly, this reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians has been selected because of the opening words of St. Paul: "I continually thank my God for you..." As the adverb "continually" suggests, however, thanksgiving should be our constant posture before God.

Paul's sense of communion with God the Father, in and through Christ, can only be described as overwhelming. He is so overwhelmed by this divine intimacy that the words from his pen can hardly keep up with the sentiments of his heart: rich endowment in speech and knowledge, the

lack of no spiritual gift, the expectation of blamelessness on the day of the Lord. The flow of words rushes on, and Paul can hardly arrest it.

The basis and foundation for this intimacy with God lies in the reality of "fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." "Fellowship" is too weak a translation of the Greek *koinonia*.

Communion, that is "common union," is more accurate. We are placed "in Christ" by God. We are "one-d" with God in Christ. God has given us all God is, the very life God is, by drawing us into himself "in Christ." This is truly cause for continual thanksgiving. © 2004, OCP. All rights reserved.

Gospel Acclamation

Psalm 85:8

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Show us, Lord, your love;
and grant us your salvation.

Gospel Mark 13:33-37

Be watchful! You do not know when the lord of the house is coming.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: "Watch!"

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary Mark 13:33-37 by Virginia Smith: Across the world today, Catholicism opens a new liturgical year. The cycle of Jesus' incarnation, mission, death, and resurrection is relived yet again, this time through the eyes of Mark. While it is true that Mark resembles Matthew and Luke to the extent that they are known as the synoptic Gospels (seen together or seen with one eye), Mark is also vastly different both in style and emphasis. Mark's Gospel is the earliest and the most succinct. Upon reading Mark's text, one person commented that Mark would make a good media writer today. There is little in the way of flowery explanations in this Gospel, and episodes are strung together rather like beads on a string. The strength of that type of writing lies

in its ability to clear away the clutter and get straight to a point which can scarcely be missed.

That's certainly true of today's Gospel taken from Jesus' eschatological discourse, the final address of his ministry which looks forward to end times. On a more pragmatic level, it can also be seen as advice for individual Christians to live by as they look forward to their own transition from this world to the next. Watch! Be alert! "*You do not know when the lord of the house is coming.*" There's certainly nothing morbid about living each day as though it will be our last. One day we'll be right, and we'll be so relieved to be ready. It's a timely message for this First Sunday of Advent when we look to the Lord's comings: all around us every day, in the people we meet, in creation, in our mortality, in his birth at Bethlehem, and at the end of human history. Watch! Be alert! God is nearer than we think. © 2008, OCP. All rights reserved.