

# Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Advent, Cycle A

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## **1st Reading:** *Isaiah 2:1–5*

**Intro:** This prophecy is a very ancient theme in Hebrew thinking, that when the day comes the mountain of the Lord will be so perfect it will attract all peoples. If you've been to Jerusalem, you know that Temple Mount is not very high; this prophecy would change all that. Note that it says he will instruct us in his ways; in Hebrew that's *torâh*, the Lord's way, the right way to live. In Christianity it would be to live the way of the Gospel.

## **2nd Reading:** *Romans 13:11–14*

**Intro:** Immediately preceding the selection we have for the second reading today the letter to the Romans is reminding the community of the law of love. That loving our neighbor is fulfillment of the Law. The selection we have today is emphasizing the importance of living the Law of Love now because the end-times are near.

## **Gospel:** *Matthew 24:37–44*

**"...they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark." Mt 24:38**

The selection we have this week comes from a larger section of mostly end-times readings. We use these at the beginning of Advent because Advent has a dual character. It looks toward what we call the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world, and it looks toward the celebration of the first coming, the birth of Jesus.

Most Scripture scholars believe that this selection is taken from what they assume to be a collection of sayings of Jesus now called the Q source. It is written in the literary style called apocalyptic which was popular around the time of Jesus. As such it is not meant to be taken literally. Apocalyptic points to deeper realities oftentimes using fantastic imagery designed to evoke a feeling level response.

The comparison of the man, and later woman, who will be taken and the one left points to the fact that to all external appearances the two of each pair are alike. The difference is an internal, spiritual attitude toward life on earth; life on earth is a steppingstone to eternal life. The message is, obviously, that we must be prepared for the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world, the Parousia.

As a community, we recognize that we are waiting for the second coming of Christ at each Mass in the priest's gloss on the Our Father wherein we pick up from Titus 2:11-14 "...as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> So, as good Mass attending Catholics, we are aware that we

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<sup>1</sup> "The blessed hope" and "the coming of our savior" are the same thing. The "and" is used in ancient Greek and Latin to make an appositive phrase.

are waiting for the second coming, but what does that mean and what does waiting look like in our day-to-day lives.

The clue comes from the next teaching in Mathew's Gospel. It is certainly no coincidence that Matthew chose to follow this teaching with the teaching of the servant placed in charge to distribute the food allowance at the proper time. This next teaching tells us how to act out our belief in the second coming. It tells us how to be prepared. It says that when the master returns and finds his servant carrying out his life-giving tasks, he will be rewarded. That is the key. Being prepared means to be carrying out our life-giving tasks as servants of the Lord. Our waiting for the second coming is an active waiting not a passive waiting at all. Paul is specific about this in the Second Reading today; "And do **this** because you know the time..." Rm 13:11 The "this" refers to the Law of Love about which he was just teaching (Rm 13:9-10).

Some people think that this teaching is about the Apostles because they were obviously "put in charge". Since Vatican II, though, we have understood that the line workers, put in charge of bringing God's life-giving love to the world, are lay people, people who live in the world. We are all servants charged with distributing the food allowance at the proper time; and, the proper time is whenever God places someone who needs to be nourished in our paths.

We should ask ourselves, who am I being asked to nourish? If we are married, our spouse is, definitely, one person. If we are parents, our children need to be nourished, spiritually as well as physically. If we are out in the street, street people need nourishment. At work, it's our fellow workers. The list goes on and on because God expects so much from us. But that is how we stay prepared, actively nourishing, with God's love, those He puts in our paths.

## Verse by Verse

Mt 24:37-39 "For as it was in the days of Noah..." | This Gospel is not saying that the people were doing evil but that they were so engaged in the things of this world that they were not thinking about the end of this world at the coming of the Son of Man. Luke uses this teaching differently. He has it at Lk 17:26-29 and combines it with the fate of Sodom. His seems to say that the ones not paying attention are wicked.

Mt 24:37 "...Son of Man" | The term can be used to simply mean human being. It is used this way several times in Hebrew Scripture (Ps 8:4, Ps 80:17, Ez 2:1, Job 25:6, Dan 7:13 and Dan 8:17 - Look closely at Dan 7:13). In the New Testament it is used as a title for Jesus, the fullness of human being.

Mt 24:40 "...one will be taken, and one will be left." | Sometimes people like to take the "taken" and "left" part of this saying literally. If we do that, it seems to me that we would have to assume 50% would be saved and 50% would be lost as the one taken and one left imagery implies. We don't know precisely what the end will be like but not everybody will be ready.

## Reflection

For as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In (those) days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be (also) at the coming of the Son of Man. Mt 24:37-39

### Question:

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### Alternative reflection:

Share about/Reflect upon the things in your life which distract you from your awareness that life on earth is lived to attain life in heaven. Why are those things so important in your life? How can you do them in a manner which will prepare you for heaven rather than distract you?