

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #1

READING I Isaiah 2:1-5

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Isaiah = ī-ZAY-uh

Amoz = AY-muhz

A rhythmical, forceful, and poetic reading.

Judah = JOO-duh

At "Come," the forcefulness of the reading intensifies. Raise your voice ever so slightly.

Zion = zī-uhn or zī-ahn

Emphasis on "swords" and "plowshares"; "spears" and "pruning hooks."

READING I Isaiah's role as prophet is to be interpreted in light of the Babylonian Exile, which spanned roughly the years 586 BC to 539 bc. Many of the exiled Israelites who had witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem were still alive when Isaiah tried to call the people back to their land. This was an unenviable task, as many of the Israelites had come to discover peace and prosperity in Babylon. What within the rubble of a destroyed Jerusalem could possibly entice them to return?

Isaiah's prophecy responds to this dilemma by proclaiming that, "in days to

come," Jerusalem will be raised higher than any other nation on earth. It will be the envy of every nation, as all peoples will "stream toward it." Although the timeframe suggested by the words "in days to come" points to an eschatological reality, there is an urgency about Isaiah's vision. A return to the remnants of Jerusalem will offer the Israelites an opportunity to be instructed in the way of the Lord.

The instruction that the Lord will provide is not simply for the comfort and security of Israel as a restored nation. Instead, it is meant to radiate outwards to all the

nations. Israel will know its redemption not only by taking possession of the land once more but also by being an example of God's justice that will turn "swords into plowshares" and "spears into pruning hooks." Instead of focusing on war, the nations of this world will learn to walk in the Lord's light. Thus, the prophecy of Isaiah is designed to make the restored nation of Israel a prophet itself.

READING II In his correspondence with the Church in Rome, Paul uses a variety of images to communicate

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 122:1–2, 3–4, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me,
“We will go up to the house of the LORD.”
And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, built as a city
with compact unity.
To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD.

According to the decree for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.

Because of my brothers and friends
I will say, “Peace be within you!”
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
I will pray for your good.

READING II Romans 13:11–14

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

You know the time;

it is the **hour now** for you to **awake** from **sleep**.

For our **salvation** is nearer **now** than when we **first** believed;
the **night** is **advanced**, the **day** is at **hand**.

Let us then throw **off** the works of **darkness**

and put **on** the armor of **light**;

let us **conduct** ourselves **properly** as in the **day**,

not in **orgies** and **drunkenness**,

not in **promiscuity** and **lust**,

not in **rivalry** and **jealousy**.

But put on the **Lord Jesus Christ**,

and make **no** provision for the **desires** of the **flesh**.

This reading is in the form of a personal address. Familiarity is what makes it forceful.

Note the parallels: “off” and “darkness”; “on” and “light.”

Note the pairings. Give them emphasis.

the importance of making “watchfulness” a foundational attitude of Christianity. These images include awakening from sleep, the contrast between night and day, the “armor of light,” and various immoral activities. Paul’s challenge for Christians to live fully awakened in this world and not to involve themselves in lewd conduct stems from the belief that the parousia is near. Therefore, everyone is to live as though *this* is the hour of Christ’s victorious return.

The images Paul uses to communicate the need for vigilance first suggest that such waiting is comparable to engaging in

battle with an enemy. The “armor of light” is necessary to keep believers awake and ready to defend themselves from the temptations of the world. Note that Paul addresses the community as a whole, saying “let us” cast off evil deeds, rather than directly challenging individuals (as in, “you” cast off sin). The work to remain alert and ready for the coming of the Lord is that of the Church as a whole.

After shocking his readers with the words chosen to illustrate the way of immorality—and therefore activities of the night (“works of darkness”)—the reading

ends with Paul’s command to recognize a Christian’s union with Christ. The one who has been baptized has been clothed in the robe of salvation and already lives in the time of promised salvation. Nevertheless, the mandate to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” entails a daily act of clothing oneself, of making the conscious decision to resist the temptations of this world. The way of following the Lord Jesus in this life requires a constant putting to death fleshly desires. For Paul, the desire is as sinful as the action itself.

Jesus uses an example from Scripture to speak about the present. This creates a vivid ambience.

Note the parallels and repetitions; “two men” to “two women” and “one will be taken” to “one will be left.”

Emphasis on “awake,” but don’t overdo it.

Note the repetition, reinforcing the message.

TO KEEP IN MIND

The words in bold are suggestions for ways to express the meaning of the reading. Consider using them as you practice the reading, then choose to stress them or to find your own way of proclaiming.

GOSPEL Matthew 24:37–44

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his **disciples**:

“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**.

Two men will be **out** in the **field**,
one will be **taken**, and **one** will be **left**.

Two women will be **grinding** at the **mill**,
one will be **taken**, and **one** will be **left**.

Therefore, stay **awake**!

For you do not **know** on which **day** your **Lord** will **come**.

Be **sure** of **this**: if the **master** of the **house**
had known the **hour** of **night** when the **thief** was **coming**,
he would have stayed **awake**
and not let his **house** be broken **into**.

So too, you also must be **prepared**,
for at an **hour** you do not **expect**, the **Son of Man** will **come**.”

GOSPEL

Today’s Gospel passage opens with the kind of behaviors that Paul, in his letter to the Romans, noted distract Christians from focusing on the parousia. Matthew refers to the time of Noah, when people ignored the call to repentance and continued with their dissolute ways, being focused on eating and drinking and entering into marriage. As a result, they were caught off guard when the flood came and destroyed the face of the earth.

Matthew likens this scene from Noah’s day to the present age, as they wait for

“the coming of the Son of Man.” Unlike the story of Noah, in which all creation was treated the same, Matthew’s depiction of the day of the Lord’s return suggests the imposition of a judgment. This judgment is one that cannot be foreknown: one out of two men will survive, one out of two women will survive. The only means of survival, implied by Matthew, is the posture of staying awake. The one who is prepared is the one judged fit for God’s reign.

Putting this Gospel in context with today’s second reading, the theme of staying awake for the Lord is a clear connecting

strand. When we consider the Gospel reading in light of Isaiah’s prophecy in the first reading, a different theme appears to be emphasized, namely that of vocation. Just as Israel’s return to Jerusalem testifies to the world of God’s mighty judgment that will impose peace on all the peoples of the earth, so does the Gospel suggest that vigilance for the Lord’s return is a commitment undertaken by true disciples. Our responsibility as followers of Christ is not to know *how* the Lord will judge but rather to be ready for that judgment at any hour. S.W.