

First Sunday of Advent



Year A: Isaiah 2:1–5; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24:37–44

Year B: Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9;
Mark 13:33–37

Year C: Jeremiah 33:14–16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2; Luke
21:25–28, 34–36



Keep awake therefore, for you do not
know on what day your Lord is coming.

—MATTHEW 24:42

COME, LORD JESUS

“Come, Lord Jesus,” the Advent mantra, means that all of Christian history has to live out of a kind of deliberate emptiness, a kind of chosen non-fulfillment. Perfect fullness is always to come, and we do not need to demand it now. This keeps the field of life wide open and especially open to grace and to a future created by God rather than ourselves. This is exactly what it means to be “awake,” as the Gospel urges us! We can also use other *a* words for

Advent: aware, alive, attentive, alert, awake are all appropriate! Advent is, above all else, a call to full consciousness and a forewarning about the high price of consciousness.

When we demand satisfaction of one another, when we demand any completion to history on our terms, when we demand that our anxiety or any dissatisfaction be taken away, saying as it were, “Why weren’t you this for me? Why didn’t life do that for me?” we are refusing to say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” We are refusing to hold out for the *full picture* that is always given by God.

“Come, Lord Jesus” is a leap into the kind of freedom and surrender that is rightly called the virtue of hope. The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our Satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves. We are able to trust that he *will* come again, just as Jesus has come into our past, into our private dilemmas and into our suffering world. Our Christian past then becomes our Christian prologue, and “Come, Lord Jesus” is not a cry of desperation but an assured shout of cosmic hope.

REFLECT

What expectations and demands of life can you let go of so that you can be more prepared for the coming of Jesus?

Monday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 2:1–5 (Isaiah 4:2–6 for Year A); Matthew 8:5–11



Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.

—MATTHEW 8:8

MAKING ROOM INSIDE

The American Declaration of Independence says we have an “unalienable right” to the pursuit of happiness. God created us to be happy and joyful “in this world and the next,” and Jesus says the same several times in John 14-17. The only difference between the two is that any happiness that is *demand*ed from life never becomes happiness because it is too narcissistically and self-consciously pursued. The “joy that the world cannot give” (John 14:27) always comes as a gift to those who wait for it, expect it and make room for it inside themselves. The first is self-assertion, the second is self-surrender. The first is taking; the second is receiving. Those are two entirely different human dynamics. You do not catch a butterfly by chasing it: You sit still

and it alights on your shoulder. Then it chooses you. That is true happiness.

When we set out to seek our private happiness, we often create an idol that is sure to topple. Any attempts to protect any full and private happiness in the midst of so much public suffering have to be based on illusion about the nature of the world we live in. We can only do that if we block ourselves from a certain degree of reality and refuse solidarity with “the other side” of everything, even the other side of ourselves.

Both sides of life are good and necessary teachers; in fact, failure and mistake teach us much more than our successes. Failure and success were often called “the two hands of God” or the “paschal mystery.” It takes struggles with both our darkness and our light to form us into full children of God, but of course, we especially resist “the left hand of God” which is usually some form of suffering (read *loss of control*). As in our Gospel today, it was the same suffering of the centurion’s servant that brought the centurion out of his comfortable house and that invited Jesus into that house! Suffering and solidarity with the suffering of others has an immense capacity to “make room” inside of us. It is probably our primary spiritual teacher.

REFLECT

What attachments in your life can you let go of to make more room for God?

Tuesday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10; Luke 10:21–24



No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

—LUKE 10:22

THE COSMIC CHRIST

The Second Coming of Christ that history is waiting for is not the same as the baby Jesus or even the historical Jesus. The historical Jesus was one man, and Christ is not his last name. *The Christ* includes the whole sweep of creation and history joined with him—and you too. We call this the Cosmic Christ. We ourselves are a member of the Body of

Christ and the Cosmic Christ, even though we are not the historical Jesus. So we very rightly believe in “*Jesus Christ*,” and both words are essential.

The celebration of Christmas is not a sentimental waiting for a baby to be born, but much more *an asking for history to be born!* (See Romans 8:20-23.) We do the Gospel no favor when we make Jesus, the Eternal Christ, into a perpetual baby, a baby able to ask little or no adult response from us. One even wonders what the mind is that would keep Jesus a baby. Maybe it was “baby Christianity.”

We might cuddle or coo with a baby, but any spirituality that makes too much of the baby Jesus is perhaps not yet ready for prime-time life. God clearly wants friends, partners and images, if we are to believe the biblical texts. God, it seems, wants adult religion and a mature, free response from us. God loves us as adult partners, with mutual give and take, and *you eventually become the God that you love*. Take that as an absolute.

I understand where such devotions to the Infant of this or that, the *Santo Niño* of here or there, came from; but these do not come close to the power of the biblical proclamation that clearly invites us into adult “cooperation” (Romans 8:28), free “participation” (Philippians 3:10) and the love of free and mature persons in God (Ephesians 4:13). You can

apparently trust yourself that much because God has done it first and foremost. The Christ we are asking for and waiting for includes your own full birth and the further birth of history and creation. Now you can say “Come, Christ Jesus” with a whole new understanding and a deliberate passion!

REFLECT

What perceptions of Jesus and Christ do you have that need to be changed?

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

Isaiah 25:6–10a; Matthew 15:29–37



On this mountain the LORD of hosts will
make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-
aged wines.

—ISAIAH 25:6

THE KINGDOM ON EARTH

I sometimes feel we preachers and teachers must come up with new sermons all the time. It seems terribly unfair