

1st Sunday of Advent (December 1st, 2019) Year A

This is the beginning of Advent and the start of the liturgical year. Advent has two faces: it looks back at the coming of Jesus in history and it looks forward to the coming of Christ in mystery.⁸

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah is considered the greatest of the prophets. He appeared at a critical moment of Israel's history. The second half of the eighth century B.C. witnessed the collapse of the northern kingdom while Jerusalem itself saw the army of Sennacherib drawn up before its walls. In the year that Uzziah, king of Judah, died, Isaiah received his call to the prophetic office in the Temple of Jerusalem.¹⁵

1This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw This vision tells of his experience of God. **concerning Judah and Jerusalem.**

2In days to come, While this has come to mean "at the end of time," we cannot say just when it will be but when that time comes, Jerusalem will have a moral preeminence and be recognized as the seat of God's presence on earth. Pagan nations will then seek the God of Israel, admit their ignorance of religious matters and throng to Yahweh's throne in Jerusalem for instruction. This prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament and yet it is still in the process of fulfillment.¹ **the mountain of the Lord's house** The Lord's house is the Temple in Jerusalem, built by Solomon, destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, rebuilt in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, and finally destroyed by the Romans in A.D.70. The hill on which it stood was known as Mount Moriah. "The highest mountain raised above the hills" bears no resemblance to the actual lie of the land for it is surrounded on all sides by a ring of hills that are considerably higher than it is. The prophecy is using words from an ancient myth about an exceedingly high mountain, like Mount Olympus in Greece or Mount Sinai, a place which was a point of contact between heaven and earth.³ **shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills.** This is really an elevation of status rather than height.⁵ **All nations shall stream toward it,** The Jews were accustomed to the idea that the blessing of Israel would mean the blessing of all nations. Since the promise made to Abraham, the Jews expected that "by your descendants shall all nations of the earth bless themselves."² Isaiah is saying that all the nations will converge on the holy city, but not to despoil it of its wealth; they will come in peace to hearken to the word of the Lord and receive instruction in his law. This note of hope constitutes one of the most important messages of the book.¹²

3many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, This refers to the temple which represents the presence of God.⁶ **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.** We see this fulfilled in the coming of Christ.²

4He shall judge between the nations, This means that he will settle disputes and arbitrate between contending parties. The prophets conceive of the Messianic age as a time of justice and peace.⁹ **and impose terms on many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;** The Vatican II document, "Gaudium et spes", wrote that insofar as men are sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and will so continue until Christ comes again; but insofar as they can vanquish sin by coming together in charity, violence itself will be vanquished and this verse from Isaiah will be fulfilled.¹¹ (CCC2317) **one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.** When the United Nations sought a text to express its view of world order, this (Is. 2:4) is the passage that was chosen.¹ The idea is that where now disputes are settled by the sword, they will be settled by peaceful arbitration; and where now men spend time and

energy on studying the art of war, there will come a time when instead they will use all their intellectual resources to establish peace and justice in the world.³

5O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! In contrast with the strife and desolation that sin brings in its wake, peace is the outcome of reverence for God and readiness to obey his precepts, of the practice of virtue and of love of neighbor. Then the weapons of war become tools for development and agriculture.¹²

Romans 13:11-14

This letter was written by St. Paul most likely from Corinth in early 58. Paul planned to visit Rome and the purpose of the letter was to announce his coming and to prepare the Roman Christians for it. This is the longest of the Pauline letters; it is the most carefully written and organized, and the fullest in theological content.¹⁸ Romans has affected later Christian theology more than any other NT book and the contribution that it has made to Western Christian thinking is inestimable.⁹ This book is placed first among the epistles not only because it is the longest, but also because it is the greatest. Verses 11-12 in today's selection are the best passage in the Bible for the aging and verse 14 is the passage that delivered St. Augustine!¹⁷

Brothers and sisters:

11You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. This wakefulness is necessary for all who search for God: wakefulness against temptation and wakefulness for his Second Coming.² **For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,** Every day we are one day nearer the day that we shall meet God, either in death or when he comes to judge the world. St. Augustine tells us, "The sleep of the soul consists in forgetting about God...Your life, your behavior, should be awake in Christ so that others—sleepy pagans—can see it and the sound of your watchfulness cause them to get up and throw off their sleepiness and begin to say with you in Christ: O God, my God, since dawn I have kept watch for you."¹⁴

12the night is advanced, the day is at hand. This is the time of grace in Jesus Christ, the time between his first coming and his second.² The light has come but the darkness remains. Grace has appeared, but sin still seems to rule our world. The king has come, but we do not fully accept his rule.⁵ This is essentially a time for conversion, until the unending day of eternity dawns.¹⁵ **Let us then throw off the works of darkness** Christians must be on guard against the devil.¹⁵ **and put on the armor of light;** According to Ephesians, this would include truth as your belt, justice as your breastplate, zeal to propagate the gospel of peace as your footgear, faith as a shield, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God! (Ephesians 6: 13-16)

13let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. These are not simply the sins of ancient Rome but also of modern America, for they are the sins that plague people of every time and place, nation and race.² We should also note that souls who have become members of the Church through Baptism are ALWAYS IN NEED OF CONVERSION TO A NEW LIFE!!¹⁴ The images of day and night, light and darkness, symbolize good and evil and reflect honor and shame.¹⁶

14But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, In Roman society, a young man put down the clothes of his childhood and put on the toga, a sign of an adult, with its rights and responsibilities. We are to cast off and throw away our rotten garments of sin and put on the clothes of grace that were received in Baptism.⁶ **and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.** We are to flee the occasions of sin that tempt the flesh.¹⁵

The Christian who identifies with Christ must bear fruit in his conscious life. Consequently, as he becomes more and more aware of his Christian identity he withdraws more and more from sin.⁹ Sometimes God uses Sacred Scripture to awaken people from their spiritual lethargy. In fact, he

used these particular words of Scripture to move the heart of St. Augustine and have him take the last step towards casting off the attachments of the flesh.¹⁴

Matthew 24:37-44

This year most of the Gospel readings will come from Matthew. They are a prime example of what St. Augustine was talking about when he said: the New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. You can't read Matthew without having your ear tuned to the Old Testament. He quotes or alludes to the Old Testament an average of four or five times per chapter or more than 100 times in his Gospel.⁴

Jesus said to his disciples:

37“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. The coming of the Son of Man is compared to the flood because people refused to heed Noah’s warning and suffered the consequences. Jesus is telling us not to make the same mistake. God is not threatening us, he is encouraging us to prepare ourselves for the glory to come!⁸

38In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. These people are not described as being involved in sin but except for Noah and his family, the rest of his generation showed no concern for God. They were distracted by the concerns of the world and were destroyed in God’s judgment.⁷

39They 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. Never get so busy with time that you forget about eternity!

40Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. This scripture does not make it clear which one is ready. Some writers think that the righteous will be left, just as Noah and his family were spared. The wicked will be taken, as Noah’s generation was swept away by the flood.⁷ Others write that those who are taken are the ones who are ready, who have shown the vigilance that is recommended.⁹

41Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Nothing suggests sin in this activity nor in the men working in the field, yet one of each pair will gain an everlasting reward and the other will not. The difference between them is wakefulness, that is, spiritual attention! It is not for us to know when the Lord will come but we need to be aware that he will come.² In both of these examples, the judgment takes place in the context of everyday life for that is where eternal happiness or eternal punishment is decided.¹⁰

42Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

43Be 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. As he cannot know the thief’s schedule, so we cannot know the Lord’s timetable. Unfortunately, our attitude is often “Just tell me when you are coming so I can put off getting ready until I have to!”⁸

44So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters* of three strategies for the demon nephew to use to win souls to hell. Tell them that: 1. there is no God. 2. there is no hell. 3. there is no hurry!

(1) *“Old Testament Reading Guide: The Book of Isaiah”* by M McNamara, M.S.C., (2) *The Commentary notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray*, (3) *“Isaiah”* by John F.A. Sawyer (4) *“The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology: Breaking the Bread,”* (5) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999”* by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) *“The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study”* by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (7) *“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew”* With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2002”* by Aelred R. Rosser, (9) *“The Jerome Biblical Commentary,”* (10) *“The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew,”* (11) *“The Catechism Of The Catholic Church,”* (12) *“The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,”* (13) *“The New American Bible: Saint Joseph Edition,”* (14) *“The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,”* (15) *“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans”* With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn

and Curtis Mitch, (16) *“The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Romans”* by John J. Pilch, (17) *“You Can Understand The Bible”* by Peter Kreeft, and (18) *“Dictionary Of The Bible”* by John L. McKenzie, S.J.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.