

First Sunday of Advent, Year C

The Sunday lectionary is divided into a three-year cycle and we are now starting Year C. The gospel readings will be taken from Luke. This is the season of Advent where we recall his words concerning the end of time. Advent and Christmas are about both comings (advents) of Jesus, as the babe born in Bethlehem and as the King of Glory at the end of history.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Jeremiah announced judgment and curses on Israel for her unfaithfulness to the covenant in the first 29 chapters. Today's reading is from the next section called the "Book of Consolation." It was written while Jeremiah was imprisoned by King Zedekiah, in 586 BC. While in prison, and within a year of the total destruction of Jerusalem (including the Temple) and the enslavement and deportation of its people, Jeremiah prophesied a future consolation.¹ Jeremiah highlights three points about the coming of the promised one: God is faithful in fulfilling the divine promises; the Messiah will come from the family of the great king, David; the Messiah's coming will provide safety and security, because he will act justly and righteously. Jerusalem will even be called by a new name, which reflects the justice of God.⁵

14The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. This refers to the whole united kingdom. This promise was made to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16: "Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever." Jeremiah is not making an announcement as much as he is giving an assurance that the promise has not been forgotten. Like our ancestors, we are the "people of the promise." For even though Jesus, the King, has come among us, he has not yet manifested himself fully. His kingdom has entered the world but it is present invisibly and veiled sacramentally. Where the Eucharist is, there is the King. The Kingdom has come to us in the past in the Incarnation; in the present, in the Eucharist; and it will come to us in fullness in the future, in the unveiling of divine glory at Christ's Second Coming.² We live in hope that not only longs for fulfillment, but expects it, watches for it and prays for it as in the Our Father: "thy kingdom come".

15In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot; This refers to a descendant of King David who would inherit the Davidic throne. The prophets often spoke of David's line using the analogy of a tree, a family tree. Now, just as Israel was about to lose its kingdom, Jeremiah prophesied that on some future day God would "raise up" another Davidic king.¹ **he shall do what is right and just in the land.** This prophecy and the promise to David were fulfilled almost six hundred years later with the birth of Jesus. The first thing that Matthew tells us in his Gospel is that Jesus is a descendant of David. The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that her Son will inherit the throne of his father David. The kingdom is transformed and fulfilled in Christ (as King) and his Church (the kingdom).¹

16In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her: "The Lord our justice." This is a play on words. "Zedekiah" means "the Lord is justice." Unlike the unfaithful king Zedekiah, they will listen to God who is "the Lord our justice."

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

This is probably the oldest finished piece of New Testament literature. Paul started this church in about 50 A.D. but because of persecution from Jews and Gentiles, he left for Athens and sent Timothy back to give him a report, which he did. Paul then wrote this letter to the church in Thessalonica but he never saw them again. Today's selection is a prayer at the end of a statement of their relationship: "What thanks can we give to God for

all the joy we feel in his presence because of you as we ask him fervently night and day that we may see you face to face and remedy any shortcomings in your faith? May God himself, who is our Father, and our Lord Jesus make our path to you a straight one!"

Brothers and sisters: Some of the Thessalonians think that the glorious return of the Lord is imminent; so they conclude that all they have to do is to wait and do nothing. But Paul reminds them of the law of spiritual progress.⁶

3:12 May the Lord make you increase Charity is a virtue which God infuses into the soul and it is therefore something we must not only practice but also ask God to increase in us.⁴ **and abound in love** There is no standing still in the spiritual life. One is either making progress or losing progress made, there is no middle ground.¹ St. John Chrysostom commented: "Good land does something more than give back the grain put into it; and therefore the soul should not limit itself to doing what is laid down, but should go further." **for one another and for all, just as we have for you,**
13 so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness A likeness to God. **before our God and Father at the** Second **coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.** Paul probably has the whole scene of the parousia in mind so this would refer to all Christians, living and dead, who will be with the Lord on that day.⁵ **Amen.**

4:1 Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus Paul means that this instruction is handed down from Christ himself through his apostles.⁵ **that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more.** This is also the message the Church gives to us at the beginning of the new liturgical year. Once again we have a chance to grow.¹

2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. This is spelled out in Chapter 5:11-22. "Comfort and upbuild one another, as indeed you are doing. We beg you, brothers, respect those among you whose task it is to exercise authority in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them with the greatest love because of their work. Remain at peace with one another. We exhort you to admonish the unruly; cheer the fainthearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all. Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test everything; retain what is good. Avoid any semblance of evil."

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

This is called "the discourse on final things."

25 Jesus said to his disciples: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars, Jesus speaks of cosmic disturbances in the manner of the Old Testament prophets. Visions of heavenly chaos serve to underscore the magnitude of God's dreadful judgment, i.e., it will be a "world-shaking" event. **and on earth nations** It is clear that the events being described here no longer concern just the history of Jerusalem, but rather, the world-wide experience of humans at the judgment.⁹ **will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.** An image of foreign nations enraged and ready for battle. Isaiah uses this imagery for the nation God rouses to punish wayward Israel. It also portrays the anger of God raging against his foes.⁷

26 People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, In the first chapter of Sirach we are told that fear of the Lord is the beginning, the crown and the root of Wisdom. This

doesn't mean that we should live in fear of God as we would fear someone or something that could harm us, but that fear of the loss of God is the beginning of real living. Real fear of the Lord is the fear of transgressing His commands. Jesus is saying that those who have not feared sin will be incapable of using that emotion properly at the Second Coming and those who have loved Him won't fear His Second Coming and so they will stand up straight and raise their heads!¹ **for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**

27And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud This is an explicit allusion to Daniel 7:13, complete with the cloud.⁹ **with power and great glory.** Jesus will visit Jerusalem with divine judgment, while bringing "redemption" to his faithful disciples.

28But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect The verb used here echoes the description of the crippled woman in 13:11 who could not "stand up straight" because she was "bound by Satan."⁹ **and raise your heads, because your redemption is at hand.** This is a call to courage and hope.⁹

34Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, In the parable where the seed falls among the thorns, we are told that they are those who hear but the cares, riches and pleasures of life stifle their progress and they do not mature. **and that day catch you by surprise like a trap.** While we may be long gone before the Second Coming, we will still have to face the Lord on the day of our death. In contrast to the general judgment that will be made at Christ's Second Coming, the particular judgment that each of us must face at death can occur at any time. To be unprepared is to live very dangerously.

35For that day will assault everyone Luke emphasizes the universality of these events. **who lives on the face of the earth.** Christians pray above all in the Eucharist to hasten Christ's return by saying to him: Marana tha! "Our Lord, come!"⁸

36Be vigilant at all times Jesus calls us to watchfulness. In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a *battle*; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.⁸ **and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand** This means to withstand temptation and face the divine judge with confidence.⁷ **before the Son of Man."** On the Day of Judgment, the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts will be brought to light. Then will those who chose not to believe and who counted the offer of God's grace as nothing, be condemned. Our attitude about our neighbor will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love. On the last day Jesus will say: "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Note that this reading entirely lacks any time-table.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Grey, (2) "Understanding 'Our Father'" by Scott Hahn, (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians," (5) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (6) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings Year C" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," (8) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," and (9) "Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke" by Luke Timothy Johnson.

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