

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – 1 DECEMBER 2024



COLLECT

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ
with righteous deeds at his coming,
so that, gathered at his right hand,
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly kingdom.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The annual liturgical cycle ended last week with the cosmic feast of Christ, King of the Universe. There is a similar cosmic sense at the beginning of Advent as we look forward to the end of time and the second coming of Christ in glory.

Purple vestments are not penitential as they are in Lent; here they encourage us to be ready and alert. The spirit of hope and expectation gives Advent its appeal.

Jeremiah encourages the troubled people of his day with God's promise of a new era of justice and peace. Immediately the psalm invites us to renew our trust in the goodness of God. Then Paul writes to the Thessalonians to calm their anxiety about Christ's return. The gospel comes as a bit of a shock with the images of the cosmic upheaval and sudden judgement. But Jesus is not trying to strike fear into our hearts – he assures us with the promise of liberation.

Today's readings invite us to stand tall, take heart, and get on with living "the life that God wants."

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah 33:14–16

See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks – when I am going to fulfil the promise I made to the House of Israel and the House of Judah:

‘In those days and at that time,
I will make a virtuous Branch grow for David,
who shall practise honesty and integrity in the land.
In those days Judah shall be saved
and Israel shall dwell in confidence.
And this is the name the city will be called:
The Lord-our-integrity.’

First Reading

The book of Jeremiah is a mix of material diverse in style, time and origin. Here, Jerusalem has been sacked and the people exiled to Babylon.

In these turbulent times, Jeremiah’s preaching was full of warnings, laments and threats of disaster, but there are also splendid oracles of hope. Today’s short passage is one of these.

It is a message of encouragement for God’s downcast people. The prophet speaks God’s promise to them. A new leader will bring honesty and integrity to the land. Readers should use a style of delivery that is both authoritative and reassuring.

Emphasise all the positive expressions: “fulfil”, “promise”, “virtuous”, “honesty”, “integrity”, “saved” and “confidence”. The tone is buoyant.

This very first reading of the time of Advent strikes a thrilling note of spirited hope that will keep sounding throughout the season. Already we catch glimpses of the birth story of Jesus, son of David. Readers should enjoy launching the season with this prophetic promise.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 24:4–5, 8–9, 10, 14

R. To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Lord, make me know your ways.

Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my Saviour. **R.**

The Lord is good and upright.

He shows the path to those who stray,
he guides the humble in the right path;
he teaches his way to the poor. **R.**

His ways are faithfulness and love
for those who keep his covenant and will.
The Lord’s friendship is for those who revere him;
to them he reveals his covenant. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24/25 is the prayer of an individual who pleads for guidance and who lauds the loving God who provides it.

In the psalm response, we hear an echo of the start of the Eucharistic Prayer, when the presider urges the assembly to “Lift up your hearts”, and all reply, “We lift them up to the Lord.” Because God is “faithfulness and love”, we can trust in God’s help.

The psalm reinforces the message of hope proclaimed by Jeremiah. The cantor/reader should announce the psalm and its response slowly and prayerfully. This will prompt the assembly to make of it a prayer of peaceful trust.

Notice the distinct character of the first verse in comparison with the other two. It is a prayer of petition addressed to God. The second and third are reassuring words about God’s goodness. They should strike a tone of grateful wonder. Let your face and voice express this good news.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2**

May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race as much as we love you. And may he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints.

Finally, brothers, we urge you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus to make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live: the life that God wants, as you learnt from us, and as you are already living it. You have not forgotten the instructions we gave you on the authority of the Lord Jesus.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke 21:25–28, 34–36**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

Second Reading

When Paul wrote this letter to the community at Thessalonica, he was in Corinth. Earlier he had spent some time with the Thessalonians establishing the Christian community there. Now he is writing as their mentor to encourage them.

Written around the year 51, it is the earliest part of the New Testament. The main concern Paul addressed was the community's worry about those who had already died because they expected Christ's imminent return in glory to complete his saving mission. Paul calls on them to remain calm and quietly live the life that God wants of them so that, when the Lord comes, they will be ready.

The first half of the reading is a prayer of blessing upon the community. Read it like a prayer. Paul is impressed with the life they are living and asks that God will confirm them in holiness.

The rest of the reading is an exhortation for them to keep up the good work. Read it with a little more emphasis, for Paul is making a heartfelt appeal that the Thessalonians grow in the Christian life.

The sentences are quite long and will require careful preparation to get the emphases in the right places. It is a letter: keep it personal in tone. "Brothers" should be read as "brothers and sisters".

Gospel

The title "Son of Man" has been much discussed by Scripture scholars. This enigmatic phrase may have been used by Jesus himself and was perhaps developed by the New Testament writers to refer to Jesus, the man destined for resurrection and a second coming in glory.

The reading begins with fearsome signs of upheaval. There is agony, fear, bewilderment. The world will be shaken. It is the end of the world when Christ will come again. The vivid descriptions highlight the power of Christ at his return.

Luke's overall interest in this passage is in how Jesus' disciples should live in the interval between now and the end time. The disciples must stay awake and pray for strength. And then they will be able to stand with confidence in the presence of the Lord.

The time of trauma will end with great dignity. It is a liberation! This sentence should be given a certain majesty in its proclamation to contrast with the turmoil of the opening lines. The overall message is one of hope and expectation.

The colourful imagery invites dramatic (though not melodramatic) declamation but the strongest emphasis should be on the positive declarations. The word "men" in the first paragraph could be read as "people" and the word "man" in the second could become "person".

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Solemn Blessing for Advent

May the almighty and merciful God,
by whose grace we have placed our faith
in the First Coming of his Only Begotten Son
and yearn for his coming again
sanctify us by the radiance of Christ's Advent
and enrich us with his blessing.

Amen.

As we run the race of this present life,
may he make us firm in faith,
joyful in hope and active in charity.

Amen.

So that, rejoicing now with devotion
at the Redeemer's coming in the flesh,
we may be endowed with the rich reward of eternal life
when he comes again in majesty.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Advent, *The Roman Missal* p. 709)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah 33:14–16

The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will fulfil the promise
I made to the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time
I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David;
and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.
And this is the name by which it will be called:
"The Lord is our righteousness."

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

Beloved:
May the Lord make you increase
and abound in love for one another and for all,
just as we abound in love for you.
And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness
that you may be blameless before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Finally, brothers and sisters,
we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that,
as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God,
as, in fact, you are doing,
you should do so more and more.
For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 21:25–28, 34–36

Jesus spoke to his disciples about his return in glory.
"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars
and on the earth distress among nations
confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.
People will faint from fear and foreboding
of what is coming upon the world,
for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

"Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud'
with power and great glory.
Now when these things begin to take place,
stand up and raise your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down
with dissipation and drunkenness
and the worries of this life,
and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap.
For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.
Be alert at all times,
praying that you may have the strength
to escape all these things that will take place,
and to stand before the Son of Man."