

First Sunday of Advent

Bible Study November 28, 2021

Prayer for Reading 1

We have seen the root of Jesse. Which has shown us the way to go. But the road is crooked and the hills are high. We can know what you say but we cannot hear very well over the moans of the oppressed peoples, the cries of the hungry children, and the din of all our wars. As Judah yearned for safety, so do we yearn for you, O Lord. Come again with promises. We long for healing and justice

Reading I: [Jer 33:14-16](#)

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah. In those days, in that time, I will raise up for David a just shoot ; he shall do what is right and just in the land. In those days Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure; this is what they shall call her:

“The LORD our justice.”

Responsorial Psalm: [Ps 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14](#)

R. (1b) To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior, and for you I wait all the day.

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

Good and upright is the LORD; thus, he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way.

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

All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees. The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him, and his covenant, for their instruction.

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

Questions for Reading 1

1. We welcome a new year of grace and the Lord’s surprises. “The days are coming, says the Lord.” What do the coming days of Advent awaken in you? How will you prepare?

2. In this reading Jeremiah reminds the people of the Lord’s promise to them. How does that promise relate to hope? Why is Advent called the season of hope? Is hope a risky virtue? Is it ardent expectation? What would your life be like without hope? What can you do to bring hope to people you know?

Prayer for Reading 2

Stretch us, Lord. We want to overflow with love for one another and for every person whom we should ever meet. We want to be one family that shares our earth, our riches, and all our dreams together.

Reading II: [1 Thes 3:12—4:2](#)

Brothers and sisters: May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen. Finally, brothers and sisters, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus 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. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Questions for Reading 2

1. What does Pope Francis say in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* about what community helps us do together? Would St. Paul's prayer, "may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all" do the same thing? Who benefits? The ones loved or the ones loving?

It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. "Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our life into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation. ... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together.

... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together." Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.

[Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical On Fraternity and Social Friendship](#) Oct. 3, 2020

2. St. Paul said he "abounded in love" for the Thessalonians, to strengthen their hearts. Discuss "abounding in love" as an effective method of strengthening hearts or eliciting change of a kind. Do you think great change or growth ever happens without immense love?

Prayer for Gospel

Jesus, You came into our world with all its sorrows. Keep us watchful for your presence in the midst of our struggles. Tell us again that your love will triumph. Make us vigilant. Put our hearts on alert. Let us be aware of all the places in our world where you are. In all beauty. Anywhere there is love. In helping hands reaching out. Come, Lord Jesus, to all the dwellings in our lives where you are not yet.

Gospel: [Lk 21:25-28, 34-36](#)

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Questions for Gospel

1. Could much of this Gospel passage have been written today (roaring sea, drowsy hearts, dying of fright, anxieties, carousing, imminent tribulations)? Jesus tells us to pray for strength. Do you believe that if you ask for strength, you will receive it? Could God send it through other people? Could you be a source of strength for others?
2. Jesus is God’s last Word to us (Christ’s Incarnation). Discuss this truth.

In Exile by Ron Rolheiser

Advent—A Time to Learn How to Wait

Carlo Carretto, the renowned spiritual writer, spent many years living alone as a hermit in the Sahara Desert. He wrote a number of books from that place of solitude, including one entitled, [Letters from the Desert](#). In that book, he has a message for those of us who live busy lives in the world. "What is God trying to say to us in our busy lives?" He suggests this:

Be patient! Learn to wait—for each other, for love, for happiness, for God!

Learn to wait! That's not something we do easily and many of our problems flow from that. We often don't wait properly for things.

[Annie Dillard](#) shares this story about proper waiting: She had been watching a butterfly emerge from its cocoon and was fascinated by the process until she grew impatient with how long it was taking and, to speed things up, took a candle and heated the cocoon, albeit very gently.

The experiment worked, but it was a mistake in the long run.

The butterfly emerged more quickly; however, because adding heat violated something within the natural process, the butterfly was born with wings too weak to fly. Haste and prematurity had stunted and deformed a natural process. Some things can't be rushed.

Dillard understood immediately what had gone wrong. A certain chastity had been violated. Impatience had triggered an irreverence that had interfered with and damaged the natural order of things. In essence, the Christmas gift had been opened too early; the bride had been slept with before the wedding; a process that needed an allotted period of time had been short-circuited. There hadn't been enough advent.

Advent means waiting. Among other things, it celebrates the idea that the messiah must be born from a virgin. Why? Is sex something unworthy of God? If Jesus had been born in a natural way, would that somehow have given him less dignity? This is a dark underside in some spiritualities, but Jesus' birth from a virgin has nothing to do with that.

Scripture and Christian tradition emphasize that Jesus was born of a virgin to underscore the fact that he had no human father and also to teach an important truth, namely, that in order for something sublime to be born there must, first, be a proper chastity, a proper time of waiting, a season of advent.

Why?

The answer lies in properly understanding chastity. Chastity is not, first of all, something to do with sex. Chastity has to do with how we experience reality in general, all experience. To be chaste is to have proper reverence—towards God, towards each other, towards nature, towards ourselves, towards reality in general, and towards sex.

Lack of chastity is irreverence, in any area of life, sex included. And reverence is a lot about proper waiting. We can see this by looking at its opposite: to lack chastity, to be irreverent, is to be impatient, selfish, callous, immature, undisciplined, or boorish in any way so that our actions deprive someone else of his or her full uniqueness, dignity, and preciousness. And we do this every time we short-circuit waiting.

Thus, it is understandable why the prime analogate for chastity is proper reverence in the area of sex. Sex, because it so deeply affects the soul, speaks most loudly about chastity or lack of it. Sex is only chaste when it is not short-circuited by impatience, selfishness, or lack of respect. Sadly, because sex is so powerful, these things are often short-circuited. We violate chastity in sex whenever there is prematurity, unfair pressure, subtle manipulation, crass force, taking without giving, posturing an intimacy we don't mean, lack of respect for previous commitments, disregard for the wider relationships of family and community, or failure to respect long-range happiness and health.

Annie Dillard's metaphor basically captures it: There is a fault in our chastity when we put a candle to the cocoon so as to unnaturally rush the process.

Chastity is about proper waiting and waiting is about patience in carrying the tensions and frustrations we suffer as we live the unfinished symphony that constitutes our lives.

There are some wonderful refrains in apocalyptic literature around the importance of waiting. Before the messiah can be conceived, gestated, and given birth to, there must always be a proper time of waiting, a necessary advent, a certain quota of suffering, which alone can create the proper virginal space within which the messiah can be born:

God is never in a hurry! Every tear brings the Messiah closer! It is with much groaning of the flesh that the life of the spirit is brought forth! ([Nikos Kazantzakis](#))

All of these phrases say the same thing: What's sublime depends upon their first having been some sublimation; a feast can only happen after there has first been some fasting; love can only be a gift if the gift is fully respected; and (as Carretto so poignantly puts it) we must learn to wait—for God, for love, for the bride, and for Christmas.

<http://liturgy.slu.edu/index.html>

(main site from which the Bible study is composed)