

GOSPEL*Matthew 24:37-44*

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left.

'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*27 November 2022*

In the Gospel of today's Liturgy we hear a beautiful promise that introduces us to the Season of Advent: "Your Lord is coming" (cf. Mt 24:42). This is the foundation of our hope. It is what supports us even in the most difficult and painful moments of our life: God is coming, God is near and is coming. Let us never forget this! The Lord always comes, the Lord visits us, the Lord draws near, and will return at the end of time to welcome us in his embrace. Before this word, we ask ourselves: How will the Lord come? And how will we recognize him and welcome him? Let us dwell briefly on these two questions.

The first question: how will the Lord come? Very often we hear it said that the Lord is present on our journey, that he accompanies us and speaks to us. But perhaps, distracted as we are by many things, this truth remains merely theoretical for us. Yes, we know that the Lord is coming but we do not live according to this truth, or we imagine that the Lord will come in a spectacular way, perhaps through some miraculous sign. And instead, Jesus says that it will take place as in "the days of Noah" (cf. v. 37). And what did they do in the days of Noah? Just the normal, everyday things of life, as always: "eating and drinking, marrying and giving

in marriage" (v. 38). Let us bear this in mind: God is hidden in our life, he is always there — he is concealed in the most common and most ordinary situations in our life. He does not come in extraordinary events, but in everyday things. He manifests himself in everyday things. He is there, in our daily work, in a chance encounter, in the face of someone in need, even when we face days that seem grey and monotonous. It is right there that we find the Lord, who calls to us, speaks to us and inspires our actions.

However, there is a second question: how can we recognize and welcome the Lord? We must be awake, alert, vigilant. Jesus warns us: there is the danger we may not notice his coming and may be unprepared for his visit. I have recalled on other occasions what Saint Augustine said: "I fear the Lord who passes by" (Sermons, 88, 14.13), that is, I fear that he will pass by and I will not recognize him! Indeed, Jesus says that those people in the time of Noah ate and drank "and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away" (Mt 24:39). Let us pay attention to this: they did not realize anything! They were absorbed in their own things and did not realize that the flood was about to come. Indeed, Jesus says that, when he will come, "two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left" (v. 40). In what sense? What is the difference? Simply that one was vigilant, he was waiting, capable of discerning God's presence in daily life, whereas the other was distracted, lived day to day, and did not notice anything.

Brothers and sisters, in this Season of Advent, let us be shaken out of our torpor and let us awaken from our slumber! Let us try to ask ourselves: am I aware of what I am living, am I alert, am I awake? Do I try to recognize God's presence in daily situations, or am I distracted and a little overwhelmed by things? If we are unaware of his coming today, we will also be unprepared when he arrives at the end of time. Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us remain vigilant! Waiting for the Lord to come, waiting for the Lord to draw near to us, because he is there, but waiting alert. And may the Holy Virgin, Woman of waiting, who knew how to perceive the passing of God in the humble and hidden life of Nazareth and welcomed him in her womb, help us in this journey of being attentive to wait for the Lord who is among us and passes by.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Why do we so often live as though God's arrival will be dramatic or distant, rather than hidden in the quiet routines of life? What does this reveal about the way we understand His presence?



Heart: Where in your life have comfort or distraction lulled you to sleep spiritually? What part of your heart needs to "wake up" again to God's nearness and call?



Hands: What concrete change could you make this week to live more alert — to break from autopilot, to notice grace in the ordinary, and to respond when God quietly passes by?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.