

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.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today, the First Sunday of the Time of Advent, a new liturgical year begins. In these four weeks of Advent, the liturgy leads us to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus, while it reminds us that he comes into our lives every day, and will return gloriously at the end of time. This certainty enables us to look trustfully to the future, as we are invited to do by the prophet Isaiah, who with his inspired voice accompanies the entire Advent journey.

In today's First Reading, Isaiah prophesies that "it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it" (Is 2:2). The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is presented as the point of convergence and meeting of all peoples. After the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus revealed himself as the true temple. Therefore, the marvellous vision of Isaiah is a divine

promise and impels us to assume an attitude of pilgrimage, of a journey towards Christ, the meaning and end of all history. Those who hunger and thirst for justice can only find it by following the ways of the Lord, while evil and sin come from the fact that individuals and social groups prefer to follow paths dictated by selfish interests, which cause conflict and war. Advent is the time to welcome the coming of Jesus, who comes as a messenger of peace to show us the ways of God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to be ready for His coming: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming". Keeping watch does not mean to have one's eyes physically open, but to have one's heart free and facing the right direction, ready to give and to serve. This is keeping watch! The slumber from which we must awaken is constituted of indifference, of vanity, of the inability to establish genuine human relationships, of the inability to take charge of our brother and sister who is alone, abandoned or ill. The expectation of Jesus who is coming must therefore translate into a commitment to vigilance. It is above all a question of wonder before God's action, at his surprises, and of according him primacy. Vigilance also means, in a concrete sense, being attentive to our neighbour in difficulty, allowing oneself to be called upon by his needs, without waiting for him or her to ask us for help, but learning to foresee, to anticipate, as God always does with us.

May Mary, the vigilant Virgin and Mother of hope, guide us on this journey, helping us to turn our gaze towards the "mountain of the Lord", the image of Jesus Christ, that attracts all men and all peoples.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What has your experience been of something 'suddenly unexpected happening' that has suddenly changed your plans or direction for the day / month / future? If you had known it was going to happen how might you have prepared better?
- Today's gospel speaks of such 'being prepared and ready' – what would Jesus' coming mean for you and your life? What would you hope and fear?
- How might you begin to 'prepare' for the coming of Jesus – in large and small ways – into your life? Would you like him to do so?

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 (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to 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 reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.