

Advent 1st Sunday, 2015

1st Reading: Jeremiah 33:14-16 - *I will raise up for David a just shoot, "The Lord our Justice*
Responsorial Psalm 25 "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

2nd Reading: 1Thessalonians 3:12-4:2 – *May the Lord make you abound in love for one another.*

Gospel: Luke 21:25-36 - *Be vigilant at all times and pray.*

♪ STAY AWAKE, be ready! You do not know the hour when the Lord is coming.

STAY AWAKE, be ready! The Lord is coming soon! Alleluia, alleluia, the Lord is coming soon! ♪

That's the message Jesus is trying to get across in today's Gospel.

Just before the verses we heard, he is speaking about the destruction of the Temple and the defeat of an uprising of Jewish militants called Zealots after two years of war. He knows it's coming, and by the time people hear Luke's Gospel account, it has already happened.

The people of his time felt the same anger, frustration and fear we might feel when watching the evening news and hearing about the terror in Paris, or the suffering of refugees fleeing ISIS. There are signs today which are similar to the ones Jesus describes. There is "*dismay among nations and peoples.*" There is war and terror and hunger often caused by the policies of nations and corporations which put profit and power above the good of people. There are signs in the natural world: like global warming, unexpected blizzards, and pollution of the air and water. The Gospel question is: **do you know how to read the signs?**

There is some help in the verses omitted in the lectionary version of today's Gospel reading [which I put back in]. "*Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they put forth leaves, you know the summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happen, know that **the Kingdom of God is near.***" When I look at the trees that are now without their leaves, I feel a little sad - but I also remember that they will grow green again and I feel a spark of hope.

Today's Gospel is a wake up call. But even though it seems scary and dark at first, it is full of hope. Jesus says: "*that day will come upon **all** who dwell on the face of the earth*" We are **all** in the same boat, rich and poor, those in power as much as the vulnerable and oppressed. I remember Hurricane Irene in 2011. Everyone in the village of Middleburgh where I live and the county was affected. But hope began to appear only days after the water receded - as people began to help one another rebuild and those who had the resources began to share their food and their labor.

Another one of the graces hidden in the experience of crisis is the knowledge that we need something **more** than money, or power or even religion to save us - we need "**God with us**", Emmanuel. Until we come to that awareness, we cannot really hear the promise of the Scripture, we cannot hear the hope hidden underneath the pain: But once we do wake up, we can hear the words Jesus says today: "*The Son of Man will come with power and great glory; Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away; You will receive the strength to go safely through all these things.*" "*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

As we wait for Christmas, we are called to wait for each other, and to wait on each other, like one who serves in a restaurant. Then Christ will be born, not only in history 2000 years ago, but in each of our life stories, and we will become mothers of Christ by giving him birth into our families, this parish and our world.

For that to really happen, I need to wait, not in impatient anxiety or fearful despair, but in joyful hope.

I like the description of hope given by Václav Havel, a poet and former president of the Czech Republic, when he writes of his experience of being pulled out of a sewer where he almost drowned. He writes:

“Hope in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously destined for early success, but rather an ability to work for something to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It’s not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”

There is darkness in the world and in our hearts, it is really there. The days are getting shorter, and I can get really down because of it. But there is also light. Have you ever experienced one candle lit in a dark room during a power outage? It changes the darkness from a scary emptiness to a secure warmth. The lights of this season, the advent candles, the lights on homes and on city streets, the menorah candles, are signs of hope that the light has overcome the darkness, just as the days will get longer as December ends and the leaves will appear on the trees in the Spring. They are signs of hope that the darkness will never defeat the light.

In the last words of today's Gospel Jesus refers to himself as the “Son of Man.” Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man” 79 times in the four Gospels. The Hebrew could as easily be translated *“the human one”*. Jesus Christ is the human one, the one who shows us how to be fully human. Pope John Paul II used to say, over and over again, that Jesus is the ideal of what it means to be human.

The readings for today teach us how to wait in joyful hope for the coming of Christmas. Jesus was born as a human being long ago, and he will come again at the end of time, & at the end of each of our lives. But he comes again and again into our hearts and our world when we open ourselves to his love and truth. And he does keep his promises.

He comes again when we recognize our need for his love and mercy;

He comes again when we love one another - when we *“increase and abound in love for one another and for all”* as we heard in the 2nd reading;

he comes again when we remember his promise in the dark times and keep hope alive in our hearts;

he comes again when we listen deeply to his message of justice, peace and love;

he comes again when we receive him in communion and become what we receive.



I invite you to be aware and awake to God's presence
today & throughout the season of Advent: