

GOSPEL*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.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*27 November 2016*

Today in the Church a new liturgical year begins, which is a new journey of faith for the People of God. And as always, we begin with Advent. The passage of the Gospel (cf. (Mt 24:37-44) introduces us to one of the most evocative themes of Advent: the visit of the Lord to humanity. The first visit — we all know — occurred with the Incarnation, Jesus' birth in the cave of Bethlehem; the second takes place in the present: the Lord visits us constantly, each day, walking alongside us and being a consoling presence; in the end, there will be the third, the last visit, which we proclaim each time that we recite the Creed: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead". Today, the Lord speaks to us about this final visit, which will take place at the end of time, and he tells us where we will arrive on our journey.

The Word of God emphasizes the contrast between the normal unfolding of events, the everyday routine, and the unexpected coming of the Lord. Jesus says: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away" (vv. 38-39): so says Jesus. It always strikes a cord

when we think about the hours which precede a great disaster: everyone is calm, and they go about their usual business without realizing that their lives are about to be turned upside down. Of course, the Gospel does not want to scare us, but to open our horizons to another, greater dimension, one which, on the one hand puts into perspective everyday things, while at the same time making them precious, crucial. The relationship with the God-who-comes-to-visit-us gives every gesture, every thing a different light, a substance, a symbolic value.

From this perspective there also comes an invitation to sobriety, to not be controlled by the things of this world, by material reality, but rather to govern them. If, by contrast, we allow ourselves to be influenced and overpowered by these things, we cannot perceive that there is something very important: our final encounter with the Lord: this is important. That encounter. And everyday matters must have this horizon, and must be directed to that horizon. This encounter with the Lord who comes for us. In that moment, as the Gospel says, "Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left" (v. 40). It is an invitation to be vigilant, because in not knowing when he will come, we need to be ever ready to leave.

In this season of Advent, we are called to expand the horizons of our hearts, to be amazed by the life which presents itself each day with newness. In order to do this, we must learn to not depend on our own certainties, on our own established strategies, because the Lord comes at a time that we do not imagine. He comes to bring us into a more beautiful and grand dimension.

May Our Lady, the Virgin of Advent, help us not to consider ourselves proprietors of our life, not to resist when the Lord comes to change it, but to be ready to let ourselves be visited by him, the awaited and welcome guest, even if it disturbs our plans.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: What does "there also comes an invitation to sobriety, to not be controlled by the things of this world, by material reality, but rather to govern them" mean to you?



Heart: In what ways is God inviting you to change in your life? Do you feel yourself resisting? Why might that be?



Hands: As a Faith Circle, how might we support each other through Advent to be open to the promptings of God to change?

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'.