



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

November 29, 2015 First Sunday of Advent

Gospel reading Luke 21:25-28, 34-36 [*To be read aloud*]

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.”

Brief commentary:

Advent is not only a season that prepares us spiritually for an authentically Christian celebration of the meaning and significance of the coming of the Son of God into the world, but it is also an opportunity to develop a spirituality of hope and expectation in the great overarching plan of God for all creation. Today’s readings focus on the one through whom God created and redeems the world, his Word, his Son Jesus Christ. Advent affirms the heart of the Christian experience and mission, which is not merely a philosophy, religion, ethical system or way of life, but rather a person...Jesus. The first reading from Jeremiah is typical of Israel’s prophetic teachings and of Jewish hope in the coming of the agent of God’s salvation, the messiah. This hope developed in ancient Israel, and by the time of Jesus such expectations over the arrival of that divinely appointed agent had reached fever pitch. Messianic hope is the belief that ultimately it is God, and not humans, who can and will redeem the world. In classic apocalyptic genre today’s gospel employs the imagery of a natural world in labor pains as the day of universal redemption draws near. Jesus tells his disciples that his mission will reach its culmination on the day in which God transforms the cosmos, the whole of Creation, when he – the Son of Man – appears “with power and great glory.” In the meantime there are many instructions given in this reading: his followers are to “stand erect and raise their heads” with hope, they are not to “become drowsy with carousing” or allow the “anxieties of daily life” to trap them; they are to be “vigilant at all times” and “pray for strength” and so be able to “stand before the Son of Man.” Believers are to expect “tribulations” and persecutions, just as Jesus himself faced them. In accordance, Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians – perhaps the earliest Christian writing to have survived – instructs his addressees to “increase and abound in love for one another and for all,” to “strengthen their hearts to be blameless in holiness before God,” and to increasingly “conduct themselves to please God,” for Christ Jesus is “coming with all his holy ones.” These instructions both from the gospels and the letter, together with Jeremiah’s joyful expectancy, as well as the psalmist’s attitude of “waiting all day long for the Lord,” are the spiritual postures of not only a season, but of an Advent spirituality that is a permanent reality in Christians’ lives. The Christian is one who remembers and knows how humanity and the world awaited (continues to await and need) divine salvation, one who lives in the joyful light of grace of the Messiah’s resurrection, and who lives in hopeful anticipation of the coming of the Lord in glory and of “the life of the world to come.” This hope makes a profound difference in the lives of Christians, and inspires them to be agents of hope and joy, agents of God’s mercy and grace in a world that daily suffers the effects of sin in the form of great distress and tribulation, a world in need of the Gospel to transform it, albeit partially, into what it will become fully on the day of Christ Jesus. As we draw near to Christmas throughout these next four Sundays of Advent, and symbolize with our Advent wreaths and Advent practices the spiritual anticipation and call to readiness that this season offers us, Christians will also recommit to forging a world where greater justice and peace, mercy and compassion dwell. No better preparation for the Nativity of the Lord could take place than a preparation of active faith, hope and love.

Today’s reading offers significant messages:

- Advent is not only a liturgical season of introspection in anticipation of the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus, as important as that is. It is also a Christian ongoing spirituality that lives hopeful of the ultimate victory of divine providence in Creation and engaged in making the world more just and compassionate.
- Living in expectancy of God’s kingdom urges us to live doing God’s will. During times of contentment it reminds us that this is not yet the Kingdom, and during times of struggle it strengthens us with hope. “Thy kingdom come” is a daily Advent petition.
- As Christians we are to live in such a way that we are both living signs of “the life of the world to come” *and* attend to the matters of this present age in such a way that we enable authentic human flourishing.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- What does Advent mean to me?
- How does an Advent outlook/perspective and attitude allow me to see life?
- How can I be a living sign of the kingdom in my family, community, workplace, society, and world?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 54-73, 1038-50