

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 85:8

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Show us, Lord, your love;
and grant us your salvation.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36; L3C

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 com-
ing upon the world,

for the powers of the heav-
ens 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 be-
come 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.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Most of us look for meaning in the signs and events of daily life. We wonder how God might be acting in our lives. Was this a chance meeting with an old friend, or part of something greater? Was it a coincidence that I was thinking of this person when I received a call from him or her? Did the inclement weather keep me at home so I was able to spend time with my family? Not only we, but generations of those who have gone before us, discerned meaning in the events of daily life.

The ancient pagan Romans looked at the sky for omens, and read the entrails of slaughtered chickens to discern how the gods were acting in their world.

The gospel reading for today gives the reader signs that will accompany the end times, the coming of the Son of Man. But we would be mistaken if we took these passages literally. And it's certainly true that hundreds if not thousands of people have done just that—looked for these signs to be fulfilled literally.

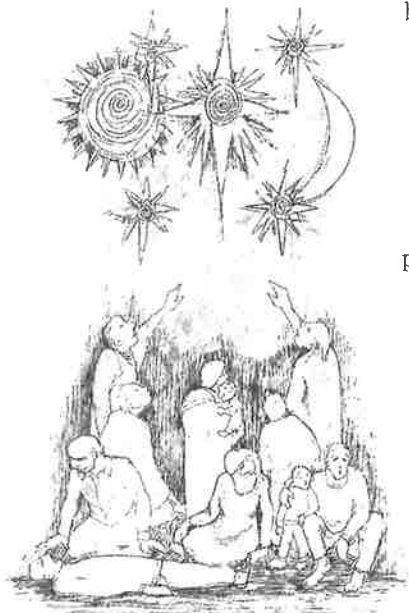
The message of this passage sought to give hope to a beleaguered people, the Christians, who anticipated their redemption. Many of them desperately wanted to see the coming of the Son of Man who would establish justice and peace. Many of the early Christians were on the bottom of the social ladder, experiencing tribulations and trials. Jesus himself had faced a violent end at the hands of the state. The Christians needed to be reminded that their salvation would come, and that they also needed to be vigilant, watching for that same salvation. And at the time this gospel was written there

were many other Christians who may have lost hope or grown weary of waiting. This message was for them; and the message is also for us.

For us, the watching for the coming of the Son of Man has been not merely decades, as it was for the early Christians, but two millennia! Do we really believe that the end is near? that Jesus might return any day? It might be more worthwhile for me to imagine my own personal end (death) rather than the end of the world. In that way, it might be easier to see that my own personal end could catch me “by surprise like a trap.” And when I live with the expectation that my end is near, or at least unknown, it can be easier for daily anxieties to dissipate. This is not to say we have no cares for the world, but rather, we have our eyes set on something greater as we live by a different set of values. Ideally, we serve more than we are served; we give more than we receive. And in that way we imitate Christ, whose disciples we are.

Living the Paschal Mystery

How would I live today if I knew it was my last day on the earth? What priorities would guide my choices and decisions? The church gives us the reading from Luke to start this Advent season in part so that we might call to mind the “end times” and the concurrent coming of the Son of Man. When our minds are drowning in lists, shopping, groceries, and gifts, we might pause, raise our head above these pressing concerns, and reflect from another point of view. In the end, what does it all mean? What is driving my actions and behaviors? Am I watchful,



vigilant for the Lord's coming? And what would such watchfulness look like? The dying and rising of Christ gives meaning to my own personal death and resurrection each season, when I set aside my own desires and aims and focus on something eternal, something lasting. It is then that we recall the relationships forged and celebrated on this earth endure forever. The coming of the Son of Man means death to an old way of life, and resurrection of hope and life everlasting.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: But when these signs begin to happen, / stand erect and raise your heads / because your redemption is at hand.

To the point: We begin a new church year with a gospel that seems intent upon shocking and startling us out of complacency. Jesus speaks of signs that will accompany the coming of the Son of Man. These signs are so terrifying that “[p]eople will die of fright,” and yet, in the midst of it, we hear a word of hope: though these calamities may occur, “stand erect and raise your heads / because your redemption is at hand.” To prepare for this redemption, Jesus counsels us to be vigilant in waiting and in prayer.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The prophet Jeremiah also preaches a word of hope, this time to the people of Israel in exile in Babylon. Even though they have seen their homeland taken over by foreign armies and their temple destroyed, Jeremiah reminds the people that their God has not forgotten them. Indeed, “[t]he days are coming . . . when I will fulfill the promise / I made to the house of Israel and Judah.”

to experience: Jeremiah proclaims that God has a plan for Judah to be saved and for Jerusalem to dwell in safety. When we hear these words of comfort, taken together with today's gospel that speaks of calamities and dismay, we can know that the God of Jeremiah and Jesus, our God, is one who desires peace and for all people to dwell in safety. How might we preach peace, safety, and hope when we encounter panic, chaos, and despair?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: The theme of hope and trust is evident in today's psalm. The psalmist prays, “[G]uide me in your truth and teach me, / for you are God my savior, / and for you I wait all the day.” Like the prophet Jeremiah, the psalmist proclaims the constancy of God who is eager to guide the humble along the path of life. And how might we characterize this path of life in its essence? In the second reading, Paul, writing to the community in Thessalonica, gives us a clue. He concludes a prayer for their community by stating, “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love / for one another and for all.” This abounding love will strengthen the hearts of the community and shape them in holiness. It is abounding love that will allow them (and us) to stand erect to greet the Son of Man when he comes.

to psalmist preparation: This psalm is one of deep longing to know the ways of the Lord and to live in God's covenant. We are called to a practice of waiting within Advent—to live in the here and now, and also to yearn and work for the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness. How do you practice a spirituality of waiting? How do you come to know the Lord?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

What is an action or practice of preparation you can embrace this Advent? It could be an action of preparing for Christmas, preparing for Jesus' second coming, or preparing our world to become more like the kingdom of God.

As Christians living in the year 2018 we realize that our own personal end will likely come before the second coming of Jesus. Thinking about your own mortality, how would you live this coming year if you knew it was your last on earth?

Advent is a time of preparation and a time of waiting. What spiritual practices make waiting fruitful for you?

Though today's gospel can seem disturbing, we are called to be people of hope and joy. As a Christian, how do you preach safety, peace, and hope when you encounter panic, chaos, and despair?