

## SPIRITUALITY

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 85:8

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

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

*R.* Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Mark 13:33-37; L2B

**Jesus said to his disciples:**

**“Be watchful! Be alert!**

**You do not know when the  
time will come.**

**It is like a man traveling  
abroad.**

**He leaves home and places his  
servants in charge, each with  
his own work,  
and orders the gatekeeper to be  
on the watch.**

**Watch, therefore;**

**you do not know when the lord of the  
house is coming,**

**whether in the evening, or at  
midnight,**

**or at cockcrow, or in the morning.**

**May he not come suddenly and find you  
sleeping.**

**What I say to you, I say to all:**

**“Watch!”**



### Reflecting on the Gospel

We are plunged into the First Sunday of Advent with a reading from Mark 13. Jesus speaks about the coming end time, encouraging Peter, James, John, and Andrew (and us) to be watchful, to be prepared, and to recognize the signs of the times. The passage concludes this ominous chapter with the key word “watch” that occurs in each but one verse. “Watch” is an appropriate word with which to begin our Advent season. We are to be prepared for the Lord’s coming, not knowing precisely when that will be. We, like the gatekeeper,

keep watch in the evening, at midnight, at dawn, and in the morning. Like the early disciples, we know not when he comes, but that he is coming. Many novelists have written books using this chapter to discern precisely when the end time will be. Though Scripture clearly states that nobody knows the day or hour, these charlatans claim to know the month and year, and you can too if you buy their books!

Today we read this passage from Mark 13 not as a code book to discern the exact “when” of the end time, while wondering what the “desolating abomination standing” is and when that might occur. Rather, we recognize that Mark wrote at a time when the early Christians expected Jesus’ imminent return. The four apostles in the story were likely dead by the time of this writing. It might

have seemed that Jesus was not coming back as he had promised. So the readers of Mark’s gospel were given a new promise, “this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Mark 13:30, NABRE). These early Christians saw in the events of their time “nation . . . ris[ing] against nation,” “earthquakes,” and “famines,” as the “beginnings of the labor pains” signifying the end was near (13:8, NABRE). But unfortunately, we know these kinds of cataclysmic events happen with some regularity. That generation did in fact pass away. The early Christians did not imagine we would be reading this gospel two thousand years hence.

Still, we can discern the signs of our own times and recognize the Lord’s coming, perhaps not in an apocalyptic sense, but in the Christmas incarnation. That is, Jesus, the Word of God, comes to us in flesh and blood. Jesus is the incarnation of God, and he comes to us sacramentally in the Eucharist. Each generation seems to say the end is near. While we are looking to the sky for signs of the end time, the Lord is in our midst in weakness and vulnerability. Do we see Jesus present in that disguise? Or is it easier and “more fun” to be caught up with a code book, discerning the end time and seeking the “abomination standing”? Instead, we see that God is in our midst. The key word for this Sunday is “watch.” But we may also say, “recognize.”

### Living the Paschal Mystery

Many times we are impressed by big events, fireworks, theme parks, light shows, and more. We mark special events with parties, celebrations, dinners, family, friends, and loved ones. While these are natural tendencies, Christianity is also about finding meaning in the small, seemingly inconsequential events

in our lives. Changing a diaper is a routine task for parents, but it is also an act of charitable love. Preparing a meal for a family gathering can be tedious and time-consuming, but it too is an act of charitable love. Being fully present to another can be difficult for us who are accustomed to checking mobile devices several times an hour, but it is an act of charitable love. Most of us are not going to do grandiose acts of charity for which we are praised and thanked on the evening news. But it is our everyday tasks done with intention and meaning that can make the difference between routine and a day filled with self-giving love.

### **Focusing the Gospel**

*Mark 13:33-37*

We begin a new liturgical year at the end of time. Jesus' brief parable of the master's return is a call to realize the trust God has placed in us in the present to create his kingdom of justice and peace to transcend all time. Jesus counters the conventional fears of the apocalypse with "signs" of hope and new beginnings.

### **Focusing the First Reading**

*Isa 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7*

Today's first reading is a prayer of hope as the Jewish community returns home. The long night of the Babylonian exile is over; the Jewish exiles make their way back to what is left of Jerusalem. Now begins the hard work of restoration. In this reading from Trito-Isaiah, the prophet acknowledges the people's sinfulness that led to their nation's collapse and seeks God's mercy as their "Father" as they begin the work of rebuilding. In the beautiful image of God as "potter," the people of Israel ask God to recreate and reform them into a people and nation worthy of the covenant.

### **Focusing the Responsorial Psalm**

*Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19*

Psalm 80 is a plea to God for help in the wake of disaster. The devastated nation cries to God as their "shepherd," their once and future protector, to come down and restore the "vine" (a treasured symbol of Israel) that God planted at Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery and now seeks to reestablish its covenant of justice and mercy with God.

### **Focusing the Second Reading**

*1 Cor 1:3-9*

In the opening words of his first letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul reminds his readers that the Lord's return at the end of time—a return that Paul's Christian community expected at any moment—was not a cause for fear and despair but a reason for hope. "The day of the Lord" is the fulfillment of God's covenant with his people, a covenant made whole and complete in Christ Jesus.

### **PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS**

In what experiences of your life have you come to realize the preciousness and limits of time?

Have you ever "missed" the good and affirming in your life through inattention or distraction?

What has been your most difficult experience of waiting—and how were you able to persevere to its fulfillment?

How can this Advent season be a time of restoration, of re-creation?