

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

First Sunday of Advent

First reading:

(Isaiah 2.2-5)

The Vision of Peace

With the beginning of Advent we turn to the idea of the coming of Christ, **in history** (that is, *at Bethlehem*), **in mystery** (that is, *in the Church*) and **in majesty** (that is, *at the end of time*).

First of all, we turn to the vision of the peace that Christ brings, and for which we all yearn. The hill on which Jerusalem lies is not particularly high, but when Christ comes it will be a towering mountain, dominating the whole country. All nations will realize its importance and come to Jerusalem to draw salvation from it, the source of all salvation.

The increasing concern of Israel for the salvation of the gentiles, which first comes to the fore in the post-exilic book, here reaches a highpoint. The permanent ending of war and strife is signalled by the remoulding of the weapons of war. You can't make war if you have converted your tanks into chicken houses and your aircraft carriers into skateboard parks - the modern equivalent of swords into ploughshares and swords into sickles.

So, Advent is a time of peace, peace between nations but also peace between families and within families, a time for reconciliation of quarrels as we prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

Question:

What can I do this Advent to increase peace?

Second reading:

(Romans 13.11-14)

The Time is Near

After his great exposition in the Letter to the Romans of the saving work of Christ, Paul goes on to encourage the Christians of Rome to be faithful.

With the Resurrection, the final era of the world has begun. There is no room for delay: the night is nearly over and the children of light are coming into their own. Paul sees a pressing need for action, and much of his moral advice, especially in First Corinthians, is grounded on the assumption that the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the world is imminent.

Did Paul get it wrong? He never says exactly how imminent it is, how soon the Second Coming will occur, but we can safely say that he would have been surprised to discover that 2000 years would pass without any sign of its occurring. However, equally safe is it to say that timing is not his concern.

The Second Coming remains imminent, in that there is no time to delay in mending our ways and preparing for this event. We are given an important reminder of this by our celebration of Christmas. Each year must really be a coming of Christ into our lives and our society.

Question:

How can Christmas be to me a coming of Christ?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 24.37-44)

Like a Thief in the Night

In each year of the three-year cycle the Advent Sunday Gospel readings have the same pattern: the first is about the final Coming of Christ. In the second, John the Baptist is preparing a community of repentance to welcome Jesus' mission. In the third, John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Messiah. On the fourth Sunday we look to Mary, preparing for the birth of her Son.

In this Sunday's reading about the Second Coming the accent is the same as in the Pauline letter: a pressing and urgent need to take action without delay. The Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected, and it will seem as random as the threat of one taken, one left, or as a thief in the night when no protective preparations have been made.

We do not even know whether the final confrontation, when each of us is brought face to face with the awesome presence of God, will be a unique event for each of us at death, or whether it will be a group event, as in Matthew's parable of the sheep and goats sent to right and left.

There is no time in eternity, no waiting room! It will not be as any human mind can envisage it.

Question:

Should we look forward to, or dread, the final meeting with the Lord?
