

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 1st Sunday of Advent

### **First reading:**

(Jeremiah 33.14-16)

*The Branch for David*

At the darkest moment of Israel's history, when the storm clouds of invasion were gathering, and the Babylonian conquest and exile seemed inevitable, comes this prophecy that the promise made long ago to David will not fail. Jerusalem will be sacked, but the promise remains that the city will be named 'the Lord is our Saving Justice'.

The justice of God is not like human justice, conformity with the law. It is God's fulfilling his promises made to Abraham, Moses and David. So at this dire moment Jeremiah renews those promises that the stock of David will never fail, and gives a corresponding symbolic name to the city of David.

Today's gospel speaks of another destruction of Jerusalem, that wrought by the Romans in 70AD, and looks beyond it to the final coming of Christ. So several layers are envisaged: the seeming loss of the promise at the Sack of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which will be restored by the coming of Christ at the incarnation, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which is the prelude to, and promise of, the final coming of Christ. In all these, the Lord is our Saving Justice.

### **Question:**

*If Jesus is the 'righteous branch' promised to David, did he bring saving justice to the world?*

### **Second reading:**

(1 Thessalonians 3.12-4.2)

*The Coming of the Lord Jesus*

Paul gives instructions about living in holiness while waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each year the Church reminds us of the final coming of the Lord, which is to be the end of the world as we know it.

In the Old Testament, the 'Day of the Lord' is the day on which God will come to re-establish all things, to put wrongs right, to punish the wicked and reward the righteous. In the New Testament, from this earliest letter of Paul onwards, this Day of the Lord is the Day of the Lord Jesus. It is pictured as a day on which the Lord Jesus will come in a triumphal procession 'with all his holy ones', to be joined first by those who have died in the Lord, and then by those who are still living.

For Paul, the triumph of the Lord is so dominant that he does not even mention or envisage punishments for the wicked. The Lord will triumph over all evil, sweeping all before him, and will carry all with him in his triumphal procession. Writing to the Corinthians he envisages that Christ will put all things under his feet, even the last enemy, death, and will then hand over the Kingdom to his Father.

### **Question:**

*Is everything subject to Jesus, even the last enemy, death?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 21.25-28, 34-36)*

### *Your Liberation is Near at Hand*

With this reading, we begin the Year of Luke, for his gospel provides the readings for almost all the Sundays of the liturgical year that begins today. We begin at the end, for Luke sees the destruction of Jerusalem as the symbol and foretaste of final liberation at the coming of Christ. The horror of this day is represented by the cosmic disturbances, the collapse of all we regard as most stable and reliable, the eruption of the ocean and the collapse of the solar system.

The Sack of Jerusalem by the Romans was certainly a decisive moment in the history of the Church, when the possibility vanished forever of the Church remaining a branch of Judaism. In this sense, it was a liberation for the gentile Churches for which Luke was writing his gospel. It is also a symbol of the final liberation from the toils of evil in which humanity is embroiled, and so of the final triumph of Christ.

It is a day for which we must prepare by our whole life, for revelation gives us no hint of when it will occur. The only hints are images of unexpected suddenness, like a trap being sprung (as here), a thief in the night or the pains of labour coming on a pregnant woman.

## **Question:**

*If these prophecies are not to be taken literally, what do they mean?*

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