

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The First Sunday of Advent—Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

First Sunday of Advent – Year C

Reading I

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will fulfill the promise
I made to the house of Israel and Judah.
In those days, in that time,
I will raise up for David a just shoot ;
he shall do what is right and just in the land.
In those days Judah shall be safe
and Jerusalem shall dwell secure;
this is what they shall call her:
“The LORD our justice.”

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

R. (1b) **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
and for you I wait all the day.
R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way.
R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**

All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy
toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
The friendship of the LORD is with those who fear him,
and his covenant, for their instruction.
R. **To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.**

Reading II

1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

Brothers and sisters:

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all,
just as we have for you,
so as to strengthen your hearts,
to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. Amen.

Finally, brothers and sisters,
we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that,
as you received from us
how you should conduct yourselves to please God
and as you are conducting yourselves
you do so even more.
For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Alleluia

Psalm 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

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.”

Exegesis

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The Prophet Jeremiah was born about 650 B.C. He began his public ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah which was 628. It was a great time of reform under Josiah and Jeremiah was very supportive of him. King Josiah died in 609 and Israel quickly turned back to its idolatrous ways. For the next 22 years, amidst incredible political unrest, Jeremiah would plea for a return to faithfulness to Yahweh. When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 Jeremiah remained in the ruins of Jerusalem until forced into Egypt in exile.

The siege of the city of Jerusalem began in January of 588. It was briefly interrupted by the Egyptians moving on Babylon. After they were crushed Jerusalem fell in the fall of 587. Our pericope from Jeremiah was believed to be written during this timeframe, i.e., the fall of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Babylonian Exile.

The promise that Jeremiah is speaking of is God's promise to King David as revealed in 2 Samuel 8-16. "The Lord also reveals to you (David) that He will establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm... Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."

The psalmist reiterates the promise of God to establish an eternal kingdom in the lineage of King David. "I will not violate my covenant; the promise of my lips I will not alter. By my holiness I swore once for all; I will never be false to David. My dynasty will continue forever, his throne like the sun before me. Like the moon it will stand eternal, forever firm like the sky." (Ps 89:35-38).

The covenant that the psalmist is describing is the New Covenant as revealed through Jeremiah. "The days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days says the Lord. I will place My law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer 31: 31-33).

Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14

Psalm 25 is entitled *Confident Prayer for Forgiveness and Guidance – A Psalm of David*. It consists of 22 verses. The "way" of Yahweh is the major theme. In his Sermon on Psalm 25 St. Augustin describes the "way" of Yahweh: "'All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth' (ver. 10). And what ways will He teach them, but mercy wherein He is placable, and truth wherein He is incorrupt? Whereof He hath exhibited the one in forgiving sins, the other in judging deserts. And therefore 'all the ways of the Lord' are the two advents of the Son of God, the one in mercy, the other in judgment."

The psalmist implores Yahweh's forgiveness for our sins and our unfaithfulness to the Covenant. Whereas Yahweh's promises stand firm, our promises to Yahweh fall short in our human weakness. And so, we stand before the two advents of the Son of God. Verse 12 reminds us: "Who are those who fear the Lord? God shows them the way to choose." The word that we translate as *fear* in sacred scripture has more of a connotation of awe and respect. For those who stand in awe before God, He will show us the way.

In awe and love, seeking mercy and forgiveness we lift up our souls to Yahweh.

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2

It is believed that Paul penned his *First Letter to the Thessalonians* in the early summer of 51 A.D. Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica and joined Paul in Corinth, and he reported the conditions of the young Church in Thessalonica. This prompted Paul to address the Thessalonians.

The paragraph in which our pericope falls begins as follows: “What thanksgiving, then, can we render to God for you, for all the joy we feel on your account before our God? Night and day we pray beyond measure to see you in person to remedy the deficiencies of your faith. Now may God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and (Our passage begins) may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you.” (1 Th 3:9-12). In his letter to the Romans, in his great dissertation on faith, hope and love, St. Paul writes, “The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5). St. Paul is praying that God pour His love into the hearts of the fledgling Church in Thessalonica.

Beginning in Chapter 4, Paul is exhorting the Church to live their lives and conduct themselves in a manner pleasing to God, i.e. living and practicing love of God and love of neighbor. Paul sums up his message a few verses later, “On the subject of mutual charity you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.” (1 Th 4:9).

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Our Gospel setting today is Jerusalem. The face of Jesus was set like flint as He resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem to face His Hour. Chapter 19 verse 28 marks Jesus’ triumphal entry into the Jerusalem. Jesus has just warned his disciples of the destruction of the temple, the signs of persecution, and the destruction of Jerusalem itself. These events would occur as foretold in the year 70 A.D. Now Jesus turns to cosmic events, the end of world as we know it.

The Prophet Daniel foretold this cosmic event: “As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Dan 7:13). In his vision Daniel makes a contrast to the beasts, the worldly kingdoms and their leaders, that came up from the great abyss; the Son of Man comes from the heavenly realm. Jesus clearly reveals Himself as the *Son of Man*. After His arrest, as Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asked Him: “Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One? Then Jesus answered, ‘I AM; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” (Mk 14:61-62). See also Mk 8:20, 8:38, 13:26; Lk 5:20; Mt 24:30; Rev 1:7, and Rev 14:14.

Earlier in Luke’s Gospel Jesus speaks of this event first in Chapter 9 and then Chapter 12 as follows: “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Lk 9:26). “I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.” (Lk 12:8-9).

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Later in Acts, Luke captures the vision of St. Stephen. “Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently at heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” (Acts 7:55-56).

The final word of this prophesy is a good word, indeed good news. Those who endure, who bear witness, who remain alert in prayer, have nothing to fear from the coming of the Son of Man. For them there is not distress, or confusion or dread. For them it is a time of “liberation.” And they can therefore stand up straight, hold their heads high in happy anticipation before the Son of Man.¹

1. Johnson, Luke Timothy; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Luke; L.P.; Kindle Ed.; page 571.

Reflection

The Season of Advent is about preparing for the coming of Jesus into our lives. It is about waiting and watching. There is nothing passive about this wait, however. The Word of God is calling us to action. The readings for this past weekend challenged us to be working and watching, to be ready and prepared. God is calling us to prepare the way for His Holy Spirit to enter more deeply into our hearts and souls, into our consciousness.

The Word is calling us not so much to be watching and waiting for some future event. The Word of God is asking us to be aware and conscience of God's presence in the here and now of our lives. St. John of the Cross talked about a profound mystical experience of union with God. It is a union of love that he described with beautiful poetic language. He taught that this profound experience of God is available to every human being at every second of our lives. Unfortunately, we are not open to this experience. We are too preoccupied with the mundane and the busyness of day-to-day life. If we were more watchful and alert to God's presence, we would not miss God so often in the profound beauty of life's abundant blessings.

St. Augustine said, "God is closer to us than we are to ourselves." God is the source and ground of our being. The road that we need to make clear is the road between the surface of life and the depth of our souls. This is the highway in the desert that the Prophet Isaiah talks about. It is the highway between our mind and the depth of our hearts. Because God respects our freewill, we are free to open this highway to God or to keep the way closed. The entire season of Advent is challenging us to keep the road clear for God.

John the Baptist is always highlighted in the Advent Season. Experts tell us that thousands and thousands of people were flocking to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. People then, as now and always, were looking for something more. They were aware of their alienation from God. It is part of being human. It is part of our fallen nature. They were aware of their need to wash away the old and rise to newness of life. They were aware of their need for a Savior. They longed for the expected Messiah.

This Advent Season ask yourself the question, "Who is waiting for whom?" Are we waiting for God or is God waiting for us. Scripture reveals a God who waits and yearns for us. Jesus tells us the beautiful parable that we call the *Prodigal Son*. The parable is about a God who allows us the freedom to stray from His love, a God who waits and longs for his prodigal son to return. Every time we get up and turn back toward God, God is already there waiting for us.

We pray, "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!" Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ's Love,



Personal Witness

In our second reading this First Sunday of Advent, St. Paul is encouraging his community at Thessalonica, and us, to ask God to increase His love in us. “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.” In his letter to the Romans, in his great dissertation on faith, hope and love, St. Paul writes, “The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Rom 5:5). St. John tells us clearly that God is love. God is the source of all love. To the extent that we have love we share in a gift of divine life.

In my 25 years of priesthood, I can point to two very difficult and challenging times in my parish ministry. The first came after 15 years of active ministry and the second came as I drew near to retirement after 25 years. (I am a second career vocation). In both occurrences I found myself experiencing what some might call *burn out*. In my career as a CPA, I experienced that at times. What I was experiencing in my priesthood seemed like something much deeper. It felt like I hit a brick wall and could not go on. I felt totally empty and ineffective.

I am a strong type “A” personality. I tend to want to get things done. In ministry I was always very close to the people entrusted to me. I am an overly compassionate person who tends to feel the joys and the sorrows of the flock. I always walked especially closely with those who were going through difficult times. I found myself taking on and carrying their pain. I am sure that many of you in ministry can empathize with that experience. Over time the cross just became too heavy to carry and I fell under the weight.

As I reflect on those difficult times, I realize that I was trying to do everything myself. As I fell under the weight, I found myself looking up to God more intently. I begged Him to fill my emptiness. In time I felt His healing love wash over me and fill me once again. In the intense busyness of ministry, I had neglected my personal prayer life. I was more focused on myself than I was on Christ working in and through me.

We are all finite human beings. What we have to give is limited. God’s love is an incarnational love personified in Jesus Christ. Each one of us as members of His Mystical Body is being called upon to be an instrument of and a channel of His love into our world. When we allow Christ to love in and through us, we can love infinitely. As a community we are called to be a chain of love, bonded by love and overflowing with love into our families and into our environments. We can love effortlessly because it is Christ who is loving in and through us. We can never empty ourselves of this love because the more we give away the more we possess, the more we have to give. This is something us type A personalities find difficult to understand. We have to learn the hard way!

