

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)

First Sunday of Advent—Year A

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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 A

Reading 1

Isaiah 2:1-5

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz,
saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
In days to come,
the mountain of the LORD's house
shall be established as the highest mountain
and raised above the hills.
All nations shall stream toward it;
many peoples shall come and say:
"Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and we may walk in his paths."
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
one nation shall not raise the sword against another,
nor shall they train for war again.
O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
I rejoiced because they said to me,
"We will go up to the house of the LORD."
And now we have set foot
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.
Jerusalem, built as a city
with compact unity.
To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD.
R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
In it are set up judgment seats,
seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
May those who love you prosper!
May peace be within your walls,
prosperity in your buildings.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Because of my brothers and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you!"
Because of the house of the LORD, our God,
I will pray for your good.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Reading 2

Romans 13:11-14

Brothers and sisters:
You know the time;
it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.
For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed;
the night is advanced, the day is at hand.
Let us then throw off the works of darkness
and put on the armor of light;
let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day,
not in orgies and drunkenness,
not in promiscuity and lust,
not in rivalry and jealousy.
But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

Alleluia

Cf. Psalm 85:8

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Show us Lord, your love;
and grant us your salvation.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples:

"As it was in the days of Noah,
so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

In those days before the flood,
they were eating and drinking,
marrying and giving in marriage,
up to the day that Noah entered the ark.

They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away.

So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.

Two men will be out in the field;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill;

one will be taken, and one will be left.

Therefore, stay awake!

For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.

Be sure of this: if the master of the house

had known the hour of night when the thief was coming,

he would have stayed awake

and not let his house be broken into.

So too, you also must be prepared,

for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Exegesis

Isaiah 2:1-5

The Prophet Isaiah begins his book as follows: “The vision which Isaiah, son of Amos, had concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah.” Through extra biblical sources experts can ascertain the dates that the kings reigned, Jotham (742-735, Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715-354). In our pericope today Isaiah reveals the year that he experienced his call to ministry as the year that King Uzziah died, which was 742 B.C. Experts also suggest that Isaiah remained in his role as a prophet until 701 when Jerusalem was under the siege of the Assyrians.

The dates are Important in that it gives a backdrop for the political and religious environment in which Isaiah lived and exercised his role as a prophet for Yahweh. It was a time of great civil unrest. The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in the year 722.

When Isaiah was called, there was widespread infidelity to Yahweh. The prophet says it quite succinctly: “Ah! Sinful nation, people laden with wickedness, evil race, corrupt children! They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized.” (Is 1:4). Despite their infidelity, the prophet always holds fast to the faithfulness of Yahweh, to His infinite love and mercy. “Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red they may become white as wool.” (Is 1: 18). As Isaiah links his mission, his calling, to Yahweh, Himself, it gives him the authority that he needs to deliver a message that might be difficult for many to hear. It not only gave Isaiah credibility, but it would give him courage and perseverance in a long a difficult battle against compromised religious practices. Isaiah, himself, has a feeling of unworthiness as he stands before Yahweh. Nevertheless, his purification occurs swiftly when the seraphim press a glowing ember from the altar against his mouth.

The theophany that Isaiah experienced as Yahweh called him to ministry certainly gave him the courage to persevere during this challenging time for Israel and Judah. His powerful prophecies helped to ignite the great religious reforms under the reign of King Hezekiah in 715. Many years passed, however, between Isaiah’s calling in 742 and the beginning of Hezekiah’s reforms.

Our pericope is titled *Zion, the Messianic Capital* in the NAB and *The Mountain of the Lord* in the ESV. As revealed in the first verse, it is the beginning a more specific prophesy concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

This is what Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. The Hebrew word that is translated in this verse and throughout as *LORD* is *Yahweh*. The Prophet Micah proclaimed an almost identical message. Scholars are not able to determine which of the two predates the other because Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries. “In days to come the mount of the Lord’s house shall be established higher than the mountains; it shall rise above the hills, and people shall stream to it: Many nations shall come, and say, ‘Come, let us climb the mount of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may instruct us in His ways, that we may walk in His paths.’ For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, He shall judge between many peoples and impose terms on strong and distant nations; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” (Mic 4: 1-3).

All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the LORD's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths." For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. The Prophet Micah expounds on his prophesy. “Every man shall sit under his own vine or under his own fig tree, undisturbed; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord, our God forever and ever.” (Mic 4: 4-5). The image of sitting under a fig tree is

Exegesis (Continued)

Isaiah 2:1-5

that of prayer and discernment. The psalmist is proclaiming that Jerusalem shall be set as a light for all nations, all people, to see, and she will draw all people to herself. The word for *paths* is *orah* in the original Hebrew. The term typically refers to an actual road or path, but in Scripture, it frequently signifies a particular way of living. or a proper and Godly way of living. (See Proverbs 2:19; 5:6; 6:23; 15:24). It is a way to eternal life with God.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. The Prophet Joel, writing years later, would reverse this prophesy when he calls people into action against the enemies of Israel. “Declare this among the nations: proclaim a war, rouse the warriors to arms! Let all the soldiers report and march! Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak man say, ‘I am a warrior!’” (Joel 4: 9-10).

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! *Ephesians* expounds on this passage. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.” (Eph 5: 8-9). The destination of the way is light. “Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God shall give them light, and they shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:5).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Psalm 122 consists of nine verses. It is titled *A Pilgrim’s Prayer for Jerusalem* in the NAB and *Let Us Go to the House of the Lord* in the ESV. This beautiful song is one of rejoicing and gratitude for the peace and blessings that the Lord showers upon all who come to Him. The Lord waits and calls each of us to come to Him. So let us go up rejoicing to the house of the Lord with gratitude in our hearts.

Psalm 122 echoes many of the same themes as Psalm 48. “Great is the Lord and highly praised in the city of our God. The holy mountain, fairest of heights, the joy of all the earth. Mount Zion, the heights of Zaphon, the city of the Great King.” (Ps 48: 1-3). “What we have heard we now see in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God founded to last forever. O God, within Your temple we ponder Your steadfast love (*hesed*). Like Your name, O God, Your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. The cities of Judah rejoice because of Your saving deeds!” (Ps 48: 9-12).

I rejoiced because they said to me, “We will go up to the house of the LORD.”
And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem. The Hebrew word that is translated as *LORD* in this verse and throughout this Psalm is *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *house* is *bayit*. *Bayit* mainly refers to a dwelling, household, or family lineage. The term *Bayit* is occasionally used to refer to a *temple* or a *palace*, though this usage is much less common. As described in Psalm 48, to go up to the house of the Lord is a cause for great rejoicing. According to the law, Jewish individuals were obligated to visit the temple a minimum of three times each year. “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that He will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths.” (Deut 16: 16).

Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD. “The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem, gathers the dispersed of Israel.” (Ps 147: 2). “So, we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.” (Neh 4: 6).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

According to the decree for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. In it are set up judgment seats, seats for the house of David. “Promote the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you; pray for it to the Lord, for upon its welfare depends on your own.” (Jer 29: 7). “And many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Is 2: 3). “And many nations shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away;” (Mic 4: 2-3). “The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.” (Zec 8: 21-22).

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May those who love you prosper! May peace be within your walls, prosperity in your buildings. The Hebrew word that is translated as *peace* in this verse and throughout the Psalm is *shalom*. *Shalom* connotes all of the following: *peace, prosperity, wellness, soundness, completeness, health, and satisfaction*. As the word evolves through Sacred Scripture it is clear that this state of being has God as its source. When Jesus breathed on the apostles He said, “My peace I give you.” (Jn 14: 27). *Shalom* appears twenty-seven times in the Psalms. The Hebrew word that is translated as *prosper* is *shalah*. *Shalah* is translated in the ESV as *secure*. *Shalah* is closely related to *shalom*. *Shalah*, in addition to *prospering* and *being secure*, means to *be at ease, at rest, at peace*.

Because of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you!" Because of the house of the LORD, our God, I will pray for your good. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *within* is *beh*. *Beh* appears sixty times in the OT, and except in this verse, it always refers to a reality living within a physical place, such as a nation, or a town, or a house, etc. There are numerous passages in the OT that speak of God’s peace (*shalom*) being with people or within places such as above, i.e., within the walls and towers of Jerusalem. This verse is significant in that it speaks of *shalom* residing within a person, as an indwelling reality. This is the only verse of its kind in the OT. Jesus would later speak of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the indwelling of love, and joy, and peace in the human soul.

Exegesis (Continued)

Romans 13:11-14

Scholars agree that Paul wrote his *Letter to the Romans* in late 57 A.D. It is believed that he wrote it from Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey. There was an established Jewish community in Rome, with at least twelve active synagogues. There also was the presence of a Christian community, obviously, as Paul is directing his letter to them. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote of an edict declared by the Emperor Claudius in the year 49 that ordered the expulsion of Jews from Rome who were proclaiming Christ as the Messiah. The historical origin of the Church in Rome remains a mystery, however.

Our pericope consists of one paragraph. It is titled in the NAB *Awareness of the End Time*, and *An Urgent Appeal* in the RSV. Many exegetes suggest that it is tied to the previous paragraph which is a treatise on love of neighbor and love as the fulfillment of the law. "Love does no wrong to your neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom 13: 10).

Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand. The Greek word that is translated as *time* in this verse is *kairos*. While the Greek word *chronos* describes *chronological time*, *kairos* describes a moment in time, as an *appointed time*, an *occasion*, or a *season*. The present moment is the *time, the day is at hand*. *The Letter to the Ephesians* speaks eloquently of the need to wake from our slumber. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Eph 5: 14).

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of this appointed time. "Thus says the Lord: Observe what it right, do what is just; for salvation is about to come, My justice, about to be revealed." (Is 56: 1).

Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust,

not in rivalry and jealousy. The Greek word that is translated as *armor* in this verse is *hoplon*. *Hoplon* is most often translated as *weapon, tool, or instrument*. It is clear from Pauline writings that the *weapon* is Christ. "Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them." (Eph 5: 11). "But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but **Christ is all and in all.**" (Col 3: 8-11).

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free person, there is not male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise." (Gal 4: 27-29).

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 24:37-44

Our pericope today is selected from a series of parables that Jesus tells with themes of watchfulness and vigilance, instructions to be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man. These parables follow the prediction of the destruction of the temple, the beginning of calamities and tribulations and the coming of the Son of Man. The watchfulness parables include, *The Lesson of the Fig Tree, the Faithful and Unfaithful Servant, The Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Judgement of the Nations*. Our selected passage is titled in the NAB *The Unknown Day and Hour* and *No One Knows the Day and the Hour* is the ESV. Our pericope immediately follows *The Lesson of the Fig Tree*.

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 24:37-44

Our passage is introduced by the preceding verses that are a direct quote from Jesus.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, neither angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Mt 24: 35-36). Our entire passage is a direct quotation from Jesus.

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. "All creatures that stirred on earth perished: birds, cattle, wild animals and all that swarmed the earth, as well as mankind. Everything on dry land with the faintest breath of life in its nostrils died out. The Lord wiped out every living thing on earth: man and cattle, the creeping things and the birds of the air; all were wiped out from the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ark were left." (Gen 7: 21-23).

*So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. The Son of Man is Bar Enas in Hebrew. It is *Huios Anthropos* in the original Greek of the NT. The title, *Son of Man*, appears over 100 times in the OT and is best defined by the Prophet Daniel in his famous vision. "As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven; when He reached the Ancient One and was presented before Him; he received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, His kingship shall not be destroyed." (Dan 7: 13-14). Jesus used this title for Himself twice in our selected passage today and numerous times throughout the NT. Jesus uses this title to emphasize His humanity at times and at times His divinity. He uses the title to speak of His solidarity with humanity, e.g., resting, eating and drinking, suffering and even death. (See Mt 8:20; Lk 7:34; Mk 8:31; Mt 12:40). Jesus also uses the title while speaking and demonstrating His divinity; His ability to forgive sins (Mk 2:10), His dominion over the sabbath (Mk 2:28), His authority to judge men (Jn 5:27), and His claim to be sent from heaven (Jn 3:31). St. Stephen confirms the vision of Daniel with his own experience as he was dying. "But he (Stephen) filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up intently to 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 *Book of Revelation* further confirms the vision of Daniel and Stephen. "Then I looked and there was a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one who looked like a *Son of Man*, with a gold crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His Hand... So, the One who was sitting on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the hearth was harvested." (Rev 14: 14,16). The image of the two people in the same local and occupation, one taken and one left, highlights the importance of the state of one's inner being, the state of one's soul before God.*

*Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come. The Greek word that is translated as *awake* in this verse is *gregoreo*. *Gregoreo* means to be *awake, alert, watchful, or vigilant*. *Gregoreo* appears again in the *Book of Revelation*. "Remember then how you accepted and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not watchful (*gregoreo*), I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come upon you." (Rev 3: 3) The image of the day of the Lord coming unexpectedly, as a thief in the night is a common parable or lesson in Scripture. "For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (1 Thess 5: 2). "Then the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar, and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out." (2 Pt 3: 10).*

Reflection

This past weekend on the *Feast of Christ the King* with the Gospel we were left with the image of Jesus on the cross. His arms are stretched out reconciling the world to himself. He is on the mountain that we call Calvary. It was the highest point just outside of the holy City of Jerusalem. The Cross was visible to all.

Throughout sacred scripture the mountain is seen as a point of contact with God. Moses went up the mountain to commune with God. On the way to Calvary Jesus took Peter and John up the mountain and He was transfigured before them. The voice of God was heard, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him." Peter and John wanted to stay in the mountain top experience. Jesus in turn brought them down the mountain because He still had one more mountain to climb, the hill of Calvary.

This season of Advent is a time that we celebrate the coming of Jesus into our world. God descends the mountain to enter into our humanity. Jesus will be born in the poverty of a stable. As a man, Jesus will go even deeper into the waters of the Jordan River, in full solidarity with our fallen human nature. He will be our Emmanuel, our *God with us*. He will become one of us in all things but sin. He will enter into and pass through, Jericho, the "sin city" of the time. Out of love for us, He will take our sins to the holy mountain, the Cross of Calvary, to save us.

Advent is a time of preparation for the gift of Christmas. It is a time of active anticipation. It is a time for all of us to do a little mountain climbing. As Jesus descends the mountains of our lives, we are being invited to go up to meet Him. As Jesus draws us to Himself, He is like the father of the Prodigal Son who waits for us to return to Him. He is anxious to run down the road to embrace each one of us. As our culture draws us away from God toward the busyness of the Holiday Season, please make room in your lives for Jesus. It is a decision that you will never regret. It is a decision of life changing and eternal consequences.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Jesus our Emmanuel,



Personal Witness

On this first Sunday of the Liturgical Year, the Church calls us to reflect on our readiness to meet Jesus at our death or at the Parousia, the second coming of Jesus, the end of the world as we know it. As the calendar year also nears the end the days grow shorter and the death of winter is setting in. It is a good time to stop and reflect on just how prepared we are for that inevitable moment in time when each one of us will stand before the Lord, before the Son of Man.

I remember as a child learning for the first time that the sun was a ball of burning gases that would one day burn out. No one told me the timeframe of that event, and it caused me great consternation for a time until I had the nerve to ask my teacher about the time frame. The answer of several billion years gave me some consolation.

As soon as that fear left me, the Cuban Missile Crisis became front and center in the daily news. In addition to the regular fire drills at school we began to practice for the event of a global nuclear war. One of those exercises was to get under our desk and place our head between our knees. I had two basic problems with this exercise; one, I could not fit under my desk as I was an oversized kid, and two, I could not get my head between my knees as my belly was too big. I confided this dilemma to my grandfather one day and his response was, "Don't worry about it, the blast will probably vaporize you anyway." At the time I did not realize that he was trying to be funny. An alternative bomb drill that I liked much better was to walk in single file down to the local church basement which was the designated Fall-Out Shelter.

As a young person, episodes like this come and go and we quickly move on with day to day living and the eventuality of death or end times fades from our consciousness. As a priest I am with people all the time who are facing death. Now as I am getting older more and more of my friends and family are passing on. A dear friend of over 20 years was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer and has since passed. A childhood friend, whom I remained close with over the years, recently died of a massive heart attack. Each day I become more and more conscious of my own mortality.

Jesus reminds us that we do not know the day or the hour. The message is to always live in right relationship with the Lord. Jesus does not want us to live in fear. He reminds us over and over to be not afraid. He wants us to live with the assurance of His love and mercy. He came to testify to the Truth, the reality that God's love is stronger than death. By rising from the dead, He conquered the power of death and shows us a world beyond the grave. He tells us that He has prepared a dwelling place for us, so that where He is we also may be. If we die with Him, we shall also live with Him. The goal is to die with Him. Amen.

Fr Glenn