

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November, 28, 1993

Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.

We have long been like those whom you do not rule, like those not called by your name.

As when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself we transgressed. We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Mark 13:33-37

"Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you were to meet God, would you see God as Merciful? Punitive? Just? Loving? Demanding accountability for your actions?
2. If you knew God the Father was going to "rend the Heavens and come down," how would you spend the next four weeks?
3. How can you use your gifts of speech and knowledge to mend relationships during the season of waiting?

Charlotte and Jim Humphrey  
Darrell and Mary Fran Zeller ☐

## Do we lead or do we sleep?

### THE GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD IN EVERYDAY LIVING



By Father Paul Turner

TODAY'S GOSPEL plunges us into the heart of Advent: "Watch out! Stay awake! Take Heed!" If the purple vestments and the sudden appearance of the Advent wreath don't get our attention, these imperatives will surely pull us up short.

For most of us, the warnings fit right in with the seasonal alarms in the secular media: "Only four weeks till Christmas!" "Lay-away!" "Shop early!"

It's not just the marketers, it's party-goers, liturgy planners, and college students who all have deadlines this month. So, the news from Jesus fits right in: The end is near.

You might expect the Gospels of Advent to tell the events leading up to the birth of Christ. After all, that's what the season is supposed to do. However, today's reading comes from chapter 13 in Mark. It's the last saying of Jesus before the beginning of the Passion. It had nothing to do with Christmas.

THERE ARE REASONS for this. First of all, Advent begins a new liturgical year, now featuring lectionary cycle "B". (The Sunday scriptures follow a three-year cycle.) The Gospel which dominates this new year is Mark. Mark, the oldest of the four Gospels, is also the shortest. It recounts the bare bones essentials about Jesus' life and death, but not the story of Jesus' birth. No annunciation, no angels, no oxen, no shepherds, no manger, no Bethlehem. Chapter one brings us right into the desert with John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. So, one reason we don't hear stories leading up to the birth of Jesus this week is that Mark just doesn't have any.

The other reason is that the first Sunday of Advent never does start the story of Jesus' birth. Rather, it introduces his return. Even during lectionary years A and C, which feature Matthew and Luke, both of whom tell the Christmas story in wonderfully romantic detail, we still spend the first Sunday of Advent thinking ahead -- way beyond Christmas, and on to the second coming of Christ. Advent does not merely tidy up the manger; it prepares for Christ's coming in our own day. Mark's telling of Jesus' parable (13:33-37) sent

a message to his contemporary community. The early disciples assumed Jesus would return quickly. So they needed to remember this saying of Jesus: "Stay awake! Don't get lax! Keep the faith! Don't be discouraged!" The master of the house who has gone on a journey is no ordinary master: It's Jesus, going now on his journey to eternity with the Father. He promises to return, but nobody knows when. Not even Jesus.

WHEN JESUS ENCOURAGES his disciples to stay awake, he details for them four different times the master (Jesus) may return: in the evening, at midnight, at cock-crow, or in the morning. These represent the four watches of the Roman night. They also correspond to four moments of the Passion which is to follow: The Last Supper, the general time Jesus predicts Peter's denial, the crowing of the cock to announce the denial, and the handing over of Jesus to Pilate. The powers of darkness raged during the four watches of the night; the servants of the master did not stay awake. The whole theme of "staying awake," is a hallmark of Jesus' visit to Gethsemani, where he prays while his closest friends fall asleep.

TODAY'S GOSPEL invites us into a deep reflection on the importance of staying alert to the Christian way of life. As Christmas approaches, is this a time when we celebrate the real meaning of life, or find it obscured by the holiday hassle?

As members of the Christian community, how do we keep our faith alive? Do we take time for education, prayer, spiritual conversation? Are we shaking off sleep and staying attentive to the Gospel -- especially at Mass?

Do we find our Christian faith at the mercy of society? Are we the leaders we thought we'd be -- as parents, educators, spouses, new Christians? Or are we so shrouded with the darkness of this world's temptations that we sleep to the Christmas message?

So many wars throughout the world today spring from religious motives. Have the combatants fallen asleep to their faith? Have we?

ADVENT SOUNDS an alarm for us. Those who stay awake will avoid the shallow celebrations of Christmas which focus too much on gift-giving and too little on self-giving, too much on materialism and not enough on the spiritual life. Mark 13 reminds us there's much more to Christmas than the manger. It inaugurates the Christian way of life we strive to follow whenever the master may suddenly return.

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish in Kansas City. ☐

### Daily Scripture Readings

Christ the King  
Sunday, November 21  
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17  
Psalm 23:1-3, 5-8  
1 Corinthians 15:20-29, 28  
Matthew 25:31-46

Monday, November 22  
Daniel 1:1-6, 8-20  
(Ps) Daniel 3:52-56  
Luke 21:1-4

Tuesday, November 23  
Daniel 2:31-45  
(Ps) Daniel 3:57-61  
Luke 21:5-11

Wednesday, November 24  
Daniel 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28  
(Ps) Daniel 3:62-67  
Luke 21:12-19

Thursday, November 25  
Daniel 6:12-28  
(Ps) Daniel 3:68-74  
Luke 21:20-28



Friday, November 26  
Daniel 7:2-14  
(Ps) Daniel 3:75-81  
Luke 21:29-33

Saturday, November 27  
Daniel 7:15-27  
(Ps) Daniel 82-87  
Luke 21:34-36

First Sunday in Advent  
Sunday, November 28  
Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7  
Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19  
1 Corinthians 13:9  
Mark 13:33-37