

## ✝ SPIRITUALITY

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Ps 85:8

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

### Gospel

Matt 24:37-44; L1A

**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 en-**  
**tered 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.”**

### Reflecting on the Gospel

At the beginning of the liturgical year, the church tries to make us more attentive to, hopeful about, and prepared for the moment of the great advent of God: the second coming of Christ, when human and cosmic history will have run its course and the timeless, eternal kingdom is fully established. God will come to us, but we also must make our pilgrimage to God.

In the gospel reading for today’s Mass, Jesus warns his disciples that they are not to be like the people of Noah’s generation, who were so immersed in the ordinary and everyday that they were unaware of the flood of evil that was

gradually encroaching on their lives. But this does not mean that we go into a pious retreat from life’s everyday demands. As the gospel tells us by its own imagery, the fields still have to be plowed, the flour still ground at the mill, but work or leisure or human relationships cannot be so all consuming that we are not alert and committed to the coming of God into our lives.

One of the problems of the early church was that because of the expectation that Jesus’s second coming (or *parousia*, “appearance”) at the end of human history was just around the corner, Christians might as well do nothing except wait for it—or try to calculate its arrival. This temptation continues to surface in our own time despite repeated and excused failures! Such passivity is the opposite of the active, discerning vigilance that makes us alert and committed to the daily possibilities of establishing the rule of God in our own life and in the world around us. Pope John XXIII once remarked that if he knew the world was about to end, he would tell the citizens of Vatican

City to look busy!—busy with God’s work for the kingdom.

In the two mini-parables that Jesus tells today, the men working in the field or the women at the mill are outwardly no different, but one is ready for the kingdom, the other is not. For Matthew, readiness consists in nothing “rapturous,” but in doing the work of God in the spirit of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12) and the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt 25:31-46). In another daring image, Jesus compares his coming as Son of Man to a burglary. Any prudent householder who expects to be burgled is on the alert to thwart the robbery. We are to be alert for the day when Jesus will break into our lives—not to thwart him, but to allow ourselves to be “stolen” for heaven.

Jesus will come definitively to each one of us at our own individual end time, which will be our death. For the whole of creation, it will be the *eschaton*, the “end time” not so much *of* the world but *for* the world. Individually and cosmically, this will be a new birth, as unimaginable and yet so much more hugely real than the world that awaited us when we were born from our mother’s womb.



### Preparing to Proclaim

**Key words and phrases:** “[S]tay awake! . . . you also must be prepared.”

**To the point:** Even for those of us who believe in observing Advent before Christmas, the secular world’s insistence on rushing to the latter can form our expectations. When Advent begins, we come to Mass ready for flickering flame, for slowly growing light, for tidings of comfort and joy. But this gospel snaps us back to reality: it is not Christmas yet. What is described here is rather scary and unsettling. The image of people being suddenly taken away is uncomfortable; the idea of being left behind doesn’t sound great either. All this reminds us that our God is a God of surprises. For most of us, God’s surprising work will be much more ordinary than vanishing neighbors, but we are still called to stay aware of God’s presence and open to the unexpected ways God moves in our hearts and in our world.

### Psalmist Preparation

This is a pilgrimage song, one that invites participation in the festal journey to Jerusalem. This trip was an obligation but is here received as a joy. Does your attendance and ministry at liturgy feel more like an obligation or a joy to you? What might be keeping you from the sort of joy the psalmist expresses here? As you prepare this psalm, pray for all who will attend Mass this week only out of obligation. Thank God for their presence; sometimes, going through the motions is a way of witnessing to love as a virtue when feelings of joy are escaping us.

### Making Connections

**Between the readings:** Compared to the gospel, the first reading offers a more comforting and joyful vision of the end times. There is unity and inclusion rather than division; all are called to be part of the lasting peace God envisions for us. The psalmist echoes the joy of the nations streaming toward Jerusalem as he, too, heads there on pilgrimage and prays for its peace. The second reading gives us practical ways to “stay awake,” through moral conduct and union with Christ.

**To experience:** “Staying awake” means remaining attentive to how small choices build into robust lives of faith. It means cultivating awareness of God’s ongoing presence in the mundane realities of our lives. It means turning our attention toward the things that really matter and turning away from things that are distracting. Advent might be an invitation to shake off the stupor of binge watching and social media scrolling and to enter into the fully vibrant lives that God wants for us.

### Homily Points

- Jesus urges the disciples to prepare. The Son of Man will come—but they know not the time nor the place. Mystery abounds in matters of faith, then and now. God reveals Godself to creation over and over, yet we can never know it all. God is too big, too powerful, too mysterious. How, then, are we to prepare? Like the disciples, we are not expected to solve the mystery. Instead, we are instructed to be present, to pay attention, to awe at the gift of God alive all over.
- What does it feel like to be spiritually awake? Think of a time when your mind, body, and spirit felt awake and present to the divine. What spiritual practices helped you get to that place? Advent is a season of preparation, a time to try new—or resurrect old—spiritual practices that help us wake up to our faith. Pick a practice that works for you: meditate on the daily readings; light a candle; sit in silence.
- The prophet Isaiah paints a vision of God who makes Godself known in bigger and bolder ways. The Lord establishes a house on the highest mountain. People of all nations converge to learn God’s holy ways and to walk in the divine light.



**Model Penitential Act**

**Presider:** In today’s gospel, Jesus urges his disciples to stay awake and prepare for the coming of the Son of Man. For those times we have fallen asleep to Christ’s presence in the world, let us ask for mercy . . . [pause]

Lord Jesus, you are the Son of God: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you are the Son of Man: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you assure us of your presence among us, always: Lord, have mercy.

**Model Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful)**

**Presider:** Jesus tells his disciples to stay awake. Heeding his call, let us offer our prayers and petitions.

**Response:** Lord, hear our prayer.

Enliven the church as we begin a new liturgical year, may the mystery of God energize our hearts through each season . . .

Rouse leaders of all nations, may God call them to work for greater unity and peace . . .

Comfort all who suffer from mental health issues, may the light of the Lord shine in their darkness . . .

Inspire all gathered here, may God stimulate our spiritual lives and the practices that sustain them . . .

**Presider:** Gracious God, you illumine the way forward for all of creation. Hear our prayers that we might prepare faithfully for the coming of your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Liturgy and Music**

**Intentional Ministry:** This liturgical year begins with Psalm 122, which reminds us of the importance of pilgrimage. It encourages us to think of what hopes and goals we might set for the upcoming journey. Within the psalm the words of Isaiah echo through—“May peace be within your walls, / prosperity in your buildings.” What goals could we set for our music programs to flourish and prosper? Perhaps a goal of being intentional in ministry. A simple start would be to recognize the importance of a good choir rehearsal outline. Entering into a practice without adequate preparation distracts all from entering into prayer and experiencing God’s work revealed in music. Careful attention should be paid to developing a musicality that is shaped by a liturgical sensibility. Good rehearsal technique will be one way to foster such musical and liturgical thinking and development.

Beyond the task of getting the notes right, root the beginning and ending of each rehearsal in prayer. Make time to read the coming Sunday’s gospel reading or highlight the psalm text to give deeper context to music making. Bring awareness to the ministerial presence that each member holds for each other and to the larger parish community. Respect each other’s time and be grateful for each gift. With praise and thanksgiving, we enter the gates of a new liturgical year of service to the people of God.

**COLLECT**

Let us pray.

*Pause for silent prayer*

Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God,  
the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ  
with righteous deeds at his coming,  
so that, gathered at his right hand,  
they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity  
of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

**FIRST READING**

Isa 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**

Ps 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.

**SECOND READING**

Rom 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.

**Living Liturgy**

**A Community of Belonging:** The songs and prayers we plant in our hearts and sow in our minds should inspire us toward imagining a welcome space, a space made holy by God and those we serve. Throughout this liturgical year, when we desire shared space and community, the Spirit leads us to discern what it means for music and liturgy to deepen our belonging, enliven our believing and inspire our becoming. During this Advent season we ask the question: What does it mean to be a community of belonging?

During this time of Advent preparation, we try to quiet ourselves amid the busyness of peak retail season to look into our hearts and reflect on this liturgical season in unison with our worship community. Recognizing that the Son of Man will come at an hour that we do not expect, we prepare holy space and take seriously the words of Isaiah as “[a]ll nations stream toward . . . the mountain of the LORD’s house.” Isaiah calls for unity, beating swords into plowshares, turning spears into pruning hooks. How will we bring people together during this season of Advent waiting? In our waiting and preparing, will we listen for what is missing within our prayer and our music repertoire?

Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye paints a picture of a community of belonging in her poem “Gate A-4.” She reflects on shared space where simple acts of kindness bring strangers into a blessed world of belonging to each other. At Gate A-4 she encounters unity within the sharing of sugar cookies amid diverse people and cultures. In some way we are reminded of the sacramental nature of our faith tradition—prayer and ritual in unity with this world as we glimpse a world that is to come. What kind of journey will we go on with our choirs and worship communities this new liturgical year?

**PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING**

- Both the first and second reading contain light imagery. Where in your life do you need God’s illumining light?
- The psalm calls us to joy in liturgy and in God’s presence. Is anything keeping you from this joy?
- How do you feel reading the gospel’s description of Jesus’s coming? How could you invite God into any anxiety you may be feeling?