

# Read



Jeremiah 33:14-16

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

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

## LIVING THE WORD

### First Sunday of Advent

December 2, 2018



#### REFLECTION

Today's readings are a roadmap that shows us how to become the people God intends us to be. In the First Reading, God reveals his great love for all people. He will never give up on us, and he waits for us with perfect love, no matter what sins we have committed or what struggles we have. In the Second Reading, St. Paul says that love will strengthen our hearts when Jesus comes at the end of time. He exhorts Christians to obey God's commands as they go about their lives. The Gospel tells us that those who have not followed the Lord's invitation to love will be shaken and die. However, those who listen and take action to love one another will not die, but will be given eternal life. We all need transformation, and no matter how afraid we are to hand over our problems and sins to God, he knows us and loves us more than he remembers our sins. He comes to us at every Mass with his hands full of blessings and he humbly waits to receive our love and attention—even if we are unresponsive or are thinking of other things. God never abandons us when we need him. It is up to us to make the commitment to spend time with him, get to know him, and let him strengthen us. Like every friendship, the time we put into our relationship with God will help us to love him. When we give him time, we will fall in love with him and our hearts will desire to serve him in all we do.



#### ACTION

Take ten minutes today in a quiet place to ask yourself: If the world were ending next week, what would be the one thing you most want to change in yourself to love better? Is there a person you are sometimes unkind to, a relationship that is strained, or a habit you have that wastes time? Be honest with yourself. If there is anything you'd rather not think about, that is probably the thing you most need to pay attention to. Resist the urge to blame someone else. Once you know what you would change, talk to God about it. Be honest with him; he already knows and wants to help you transform.



Listen to the song,

*"The Saint That Is Just Me"*

by Danielle Rose.



<https://youtube/yQGMce76JcU>



#### QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ If you only had one week left to live, what is one thing you would most want to change in yourself? Why?
- ❖ What do you need to do in order to make this change happen?



# Introduction to **ADVENT**



## **The Season**

Of all of the seasons of the liturgical year, Advent is the one many Catholics misunderstand. To top it all, the spirit of Advent is difficult to maintain with all of the references to “the Christmas season” in advertisements, television and radio programming, social gatherings, school assemblies, and family preparations. Yet the season of Advent is necessary if we are to celebrate Christmas well and if we are to live our lives well. Advent’s dual focus is likely the cause of some of the misperception about the season among many in our pews. At the beginning of the season, we focus on the end of all time, and the eventuality of our death and judgment. This is important. It is an annual checkup on our recognition that our actions have bearing on the way we will be judged by Christ, upon our death, and the way humanity will be judged at the end of time. In addition, the focus on the end of time at the beginning of Advent sets the stage for our preparation for the season of Christmas, when we immerse ourselves in the mystery of the Incarnation, and in God’s great love and mercy for all.

Therefore, we must be unapologetic in our insistence on observing the season when we are in our parish settings, and provide as much catechesis as possible through word and witness, color, ritual, and prayer. Send the youth home with the sounds and sights of Advent in their minds and hearts, so that the season may lead all of us to wait, prepare, and hope in the saving love of Jesus Christ.

## **Advent Environment**

The place where you gather with teens should mirror the liturgical environment in the church worship space. Try to hold off on putting any Christmas

decorations in your space until the late afternoon or evening of December 24. The space where you gather may be the only opportunity the youth have to get away from overdone commercial merrymaking in order to enter into the spirit of Advent. Set an Advent mood with candlelight or dimmed lighting and simple decorations in shades of violet and rose. Bring an Advent wreath into your space and set it in a central place, lighting the appropriate number of candles each time you pray. Try to avoid bringing in wreaths or Christmas trees until Christmas Time has begun. If you must bring them in, decorate them very simply with white lights for now, and add Christmas colors and ornaments only after the season has begun. Take effort to make this a prayerful, quiet, expectant space. Slow down the pace of your gatherings to give the teens time to reflect and relax in silence. If the teens object to a perceived postponement of Christmas merriment, encourage them to talk about the contrast between your space and the environment at home, school, or public places in the weeks leading up to Christmas. What value does Advent hold?

## **Advent with Teens**

Many teens appreciate the rhythm of the transitions to Advent and then to Christmas, particularly if they mark these seasons at home through special prayer and traditions. Teens may be uncomfortable with the early Advent focus on the end of time, especially if they have recently experienced the death of a loved one. They likely already know that Advent is about waiting, anticipation, and preparation. Invite your teens to keep this brief yet spiritually rich season well, and ask them to share their progress as Advent unfolds.



December 2, 2018

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### LECTIONARY #3C

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14 (1b)

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

## Prepare for the Word

*The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.*

### Leader's Context

This week begins the season of Advent. Advent invites us to hope. This new season shifts our focus from darkness to light; Advent invites us to pause, reflect, and prepare. The readings today are a great reminder of what our focus should be, not only during Advent but for every day. We live in a world that often focuses on fear. Today's readings remind us to put the pressures and fears of this world aside and to trust in God. God is the "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). There will be signs and things that might scare us. Anticipation of what might happen can cause great anxiety. However, if we stay focused on God, we have nothing to fear. As you prepare to experience the Word today, listen with an ear of trust. Listen to the words that remind us that there will be things that scare us, and balance that with the knowledge that we are never alone; God will never abandon us. Listen to each story you hear with eyes and ears focused on God—"the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

**Q FOCUS:** *To put aside the pressures and fears of this world and trust in God.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

Begin by showing students the new liturgical calendar. Show them where Advent appears on the calendar and note that it is a preparatory season for Christ's Second Coming and for Christmas. During Advent, we prepare ourselves spiritually—beyond

our homes, trees, gift giving, and so on—for Christ to fill our hearts and our lives. Point out that on Saturday of this week (December 8) the Church celebrates the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a solemnity that recognizes that Mary was kept free from original sin from the moment of her conception. The solemnity is the Patronal Feastday of the United States of America. Because it falls on a Saturday this year, the obligation to attend Mass is lifted; however, be sure to encourage your teens to still attend Mass.

### Church Teaching Connection

Pope Francis (in collaboration with Pope Benedict XVI) wrote his first encyclical letter, *Lumen fidei*, in June 2013. This letter emphasizes the importance of Jesus as the light in our darkness: "In the absence of light everything becomes confused; it is impossible to tell good from evil, or the road to our destination from other roads which take us in endless circles, going nowhere" (3). Let us keep this realization with us throughout Advent and be mindful of the times we see and rely on Christ's light for our journey . . . both literally and figuratively.

## Hear the Word

*Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.*

### Gospel Acclamation

*Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.*

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

*All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.*

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."

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

In today's readings we hear God make a promise to his people about salvation; we hear the psalmist lift his soul to God and ask for guidance; and we hear St. Paul ask God to assist the Thessalonian community in increasing their love for each other and strengthening their hearts in God. *(Since you did not proclaim the other readings at today's gathering, you might need to recap the stories for the teens).* Then, in the Gospel, we hear the words of Jesus warning us that there will be things that scare us, things we don't understand, and that people will "die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world" (Luke 21:26). Jesus then reminds them (and us) that we will also encounter him in all his glory at the end of time. But, we are not to fear. In Christ will come peace to all. This is a great reminder for all of

us as this still happens today. People are often afraid of things happening in our world, and in their lives. That fear can distract us from focusing and clinging to the only thing that is guaranteed—the unconditional love of God.

► What are some things that you fear?

► What are some things that seem so scary that it takes your focus away from God?

► Is it difficult for you to remember that God is always with you, because you are unable to see God or physically feel him?

Jesus reminds the people to stand tall and raise their heads instead of being filled with fear. Sometimes just changing the way we sit or stand can affect how confident we feel. *(Try that with teens . . . sit or stand tall and see if it changes the way you feel!)* Jesus warns against our hearts becoming "drowsy" from things like the "anxieties of daily life" (Luke 21:34). He also warns that the pressures of daily life can catch us like a trap! Traps catch those who are not prepared, those who are not mindful or aware of what surrounds them. Our goal this Advent is that we remain mindful of the presence of God and the ways that he will guide our hearts. Jesus reminds us that with God all things are possible. Let us begin this season of Advent with full confidence that God is with us and even when life gets scary, we can, and should, keep our focus on God.

► What are some things you can do during the week as a reminder of the fact that God is present with you?

► If you were to create a sticky note or poster with something that would remind you of God's presence, what would it say?

Advent is a journey, like hiking down a trail. We need to watch the trailheads provided so we stay on the right path. Today's psalm reminds us: "All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy / toward those who keep his covenant and his decrees" (25:10). God's paths are kindness. God's paths are joy, love, and those things that are positive and not of the ego. God is our focus and he will provide us with the trailheads we need to follow the way. Of course, it is important for us to remember

that if, by chance, we lose our way, God is there as the light to gently guide us back. Keep your eyes open for those trailheads! They are always there. Offer yourself to God during this Advent and pray that your eyes may be open to see the signs, the positive signs that will lead you to him.

► **What message or mantra will remind you of this reality throughout the week?**

► **How will you show others that you are confident that God is with you and God's love is bigger than fear?**

## Wrapping It Up

*Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 80.*

**This week we enter a new liturgical season, the season of Advent. Remember that the season and its readings provide us with a message of hope.**

**We are called to remember that no matter what the world presents to us and no matter what our fears are, God is always with us and never leaves us.**

**During the week we should remind ourselves of God's love and his presence with us.**

## Act on the Word

### Stay the Path: Part I

*You will need construction paper, pens, markers, scissors, and old magazines for this activity.*

Using construction paper, ask teens to create a path that will be displayed in your meeting place. Each week during Advent invite students to place reminders of God's presence and love on the path. Ask:

► **How did you experience God this week?**

The reminders should be recognized as "trailheads" or markers that lead us, guide us, and keep us focused on God rather than the "things" of this world.

Invite students to create a poster of phrases and mantras that will help them remember that God is

always with them and loves them unconditionally. Teens can cut out words and phrases from magazines. Have them share their creation with the group.

Have students share (*only those who are comfortable with sharing*) their personal fears that can sometimes distract them from God's love. Do others share those fears? (*Because of confidentiality concerns, you may wish to do this in small groups rather than the larger group.*) Have teens share how they find comfort in God and invite them to turn those fears over to God during this season of hope.

Practice changing posture. Feel the difference between low confidence posture and high confidence posture. You can do this as a guided exercise. Teens should form themselves into a crouched ball position or crouch over chairs. Ask teens to imagine they are filled with the Holy Spirit (the love of God). As they become filled with the Spirit, they "inflate"—growing and standing taller more erectly and with confidence. Suggest that they incorporate this into their daily prayer or stretching routine at home.

Throughout the next week, encourage teens to notice negative things posted on social media that invoke fear. Have teens print these things or journal about what they witnessed. Teens should be prepared to bring these concerns to your next gathering and share what they found. Then, follow up by noting how God's love and light can conquer all fears.

## Closing Prayer

O God,  
you are the way, the truth, and the light.  
You are never far from us.  
Fill us with your grace,  
calm our every fear,  
and be present to us in everything that we do.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## For the Holyday of Obligation

*To help teens prepare for the Immaculate Conception, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.*