

Read

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

Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16,
18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

LIVING THE WORD

First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2023



REFLECTION

In this first week of Advent, we are invited by today's Gospel reading to be alert and vigilant. We are told to prepare ourselves and to watch. But what are preparing for? What are we watching for? Advent encourages all of us to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas and for Jesus' coming at the end of time. We know that Jesus already came into the world; this is what we celebrate at Christmas. But we also know that Jesus is coming at the end of time to usher in the kingdom of God; Christmas is also a time to remember that he is coming again. This is what we need to prepare for.

If you knew you were going to meet Jesus tomorrow, how would you act today? Most of us would agree we would want to show the very best versions of ourselves. The idea of meeting Jesus might also stir inside you questions you have about faith and God. Advent is a time to prepare, reflect, and reshape ourselves. Today's reading reminds us that the time for our best self is now.



ACTION

This week, spend ten minutes each day reflecting on your heart, your body and mind, and your soul in order to prepare yourself for Christ. Each night, choose a different aspect to reflect on. If you are reflecting on your heart, you can ask yourself questions like, "How can I love my family and friends better?" Be sure to be honest with yourself and God in your responses. For your body and mind, you might ask yourself, "How am I using my physical and mental strengths to help others in this world? Am I treating my body with care to ensure my ability to help others?" And lastly, for your spirit you might reflect on your emotional wellbeing and your personal faith.

"Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway."

—Mother Teresa 

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How can you be ready to encounter Jesus every day?
- ❖ How can your family or your parish Advent practices help you prepare for Christmas?

Introduction to ADVENT



The Season

Of all of the seasons of the liturgical year, Advent is the one many Catholics misunderstand. Not only that, but 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. Alongside this focus of repentance, Advent also is a time of joyful expectation. We await the end of time with joyful hope because we trust in God’s promise of eternal life and look forward to the second coming of Christ. We also prepare our hearts to joyfully receive Christ in the mystery of the incarnation, through which God showed the world his immeasurable love and mercy by sending his only Son to us for our salvation.

We, then, 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 young people 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.

Celebrating 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. Focusing on Advent during Advent allows for a richer appreciation of the mystery of the incarnation that we will celebrate during Christmas Time.

Preparing the Liturgical Environment

Use Advent violet to help set the tone for your gatherings with the teens during this season. The liturgical environment for Advent will be in stark contrast to the Christmas decorations that can overwhelm us in the weeks leading up to Christmas. A few bare branches or images of Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary might be included in your Advent environment, along with an Advent wreath. Leave a Bible open to the Gospel for the current Sunday.



December 3, 2023

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #2B

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

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1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

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

Today's Gospel is short and to the point. Jesus reminds us that we can't know when the end of days will come, and so we must always prepare. His comparison to the man who leaves his servants, "each with his own work," is actually a more helpful analogy than we might expect. This point drives home that we each have a role to fill in bringing about God's kingdom here on earth. It can be difficult to do work without a formal "deadline" to meet. But our role as disciples is not about certain things we need to accomplish; it's about who we choose to be and how we choose to live in our relationships to one another and God.

Q FOCUS: *Discipleship is not about accomplishment, it's about character.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

This season of Advent marks the beginning of our liturgical year. It might seem strange to begin with a season that our culture so often overlooks. As we approach the end of the calendar year, everything is focused on Christmas. But Advent isn't (just) about preparing for Christmas, it's about preparing ourselves for Christ's presence. Yes, we're mindful of Christ's original coming in the incarnation, but we also should be attentive to Christ's activity in our lives today, as well as his coming at the end of time. We begin the year in Advent by asking ourselves if we are prepared to receive Christ when he comes

again. This Church year is like a spiral staircase: we repeat the same pattern of steps year after year, but we don't stay in the same place spiritually.

Church Teaching Connection

"The person who *takes heed* is the one who, amid the worldly din, does not let himself be overwhelmed by distraction or superficiality, but lives in a full and conscious way, with concern first and foremost *for others*. With this manner we become aware of the tears and the needs of neighbours and we can also understand their human and spiritual strengths and qualities" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 3, 2017).

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

Mark 13:33-37

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not

come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'"

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:

The analogy that Jesus uses today might not seem relatable to most people. After all, we don't usually have servants to leave in charge of our homes when we go away.

► **How does your family make your home ready when you plan to be away for a long time?**

We have a system for keeping our house safe and ensuring that it will be ready when we return. Looking more closely at the analogy Jesus poses, what if we think about this not as an analogy, but as if Jesus was actually describing the reality of what would happen after his ascension? Place yourselves in this story. We are all called to be God's servants, each of us with our own unique gifts, callings, and responsibilities. Like the scenario Jesus describes, we don't know when Christ will come again. We don't know when this promised day will arrive, or even when our own lives will end. All of this uncertainty about the future can tempt us to put aside our preparations for Christ's return. And yet the message of this Gospel is clear: because it can happen at any moment, we must always strive to be ready.

► **How does your family prepare your home for guests?**

It's different to prepare for someone's arrival than it is to get ready to take a trip yourself. When you are going on a trip, you're trying to figure out what you need to take with you. But when we are preparing to receive guests, we're focused on what they will see and experience when they enter our home. What

does it mean to prepare for Christ's coming? In the case of preparing for the end of time when Christ will come again, we are talking not about welcoming Christ into our homes, but into our hearts. When we stand before Christ on the day of judgement, what do we want him to find in our hearts?

This is where the teachings of Jesus and the Church help us. If we truly know and understand and believe these teachings, then we know what God desires from us. And we know that welcoming God into our hearts means opening our hearts to the people and world around us as we work to build up the kingdom of God here on earth.

► **What might it look like to be focused on this type of preparation during Advent?**

One way to approach our Advent preparations is through the lens of relationship. Part of our responsibility as Christians is to have healthy relationships with God, with others, with creation, and with ourselves. Healthy relationships require attentiveness; without attention and care, relationships suffer and negatively impact our lives and the lives of others. At first, being intentional about everything we are doing can seem overwhelming. So, take it a little at a time. Each day strive to be attentive to one relationship in particular. Over the next several weeks, you will find that your ability to be attentive has grown and you might be able to manage more than you were able to at the beginning. When we show others love, we are showing love to God who helps us in our work.

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.

Jesus reminds us to always keep our hearts ready to welcome him.

Christians are always waiting for Jesus' return, not just during Advent.

Good relationships require attention, whether with God, ourselves, or those around us.

Act on the Word

Spiritual Housekeeping

For this activity, you will need paper or journals and pens. Ideally, try to provide space for people to spread out to reflect and write.

Share with the young people that this activity is called “Spiritual Housekeeping” because they are going to spend some time going through their to-do list in order to prepare their hearts for God, much like they might create a to-do list when they need to clean the house before hosting guests. Have the teens spread out throughout the room to give them privacy to write their responses. Encourage them to be honest with themselves and God as they go through this, since they will not be required to share their thoughts.

First, lead the teens in a reflection about their relationship with God. Some questions to guide them include the following: What is my relationship with God like right now? How often do I pray or talk to God? Do I feel like God is present or active in my life? Do I feel loved by God, and do I love God? What needs to happen for me to strengthen or improve my relationship with God?

Then guide the teens to reflect on their relationships with others: What are my relationships like with my family and friends? Do I find myself becoming frustrated or upset with any of them? Do I treat people kindly, or do I find myself thinking that I can do better in how I act towards others? Is there anybody who I need to forgive, or anybody to whom I owe an apology? How can I become a better friend and family member?

Finally, have them reflect on their relationship with themselves. Ask: How do I feel about myself? Am I happy with who I am? Am I happy with the choices I make, and who I choose to be to others? Do I take time to care for my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health? Are there any of these areas that I need to spend time working on? What can I do to better my relationship with myself?

After the time for reflection and journaling, you might ask if anyone wanted to share with the group anything they noticed come up in their prayer, or how this reflection impacted them. It is okay if there are no volunteers since these were personal questions.

Closing Prayer

*God our Father,
we are your servants,
the work of your hands.
Renew your spirit of holiness in us this*

*Advent season.
Make us attentive to your presence,
and keep us faithful in our service
to you.*

*Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, 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. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.