

Bible Study

Second Sunday of Advent, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord God, when your people wandered in the darkness of sin, you sent the True Light to live among them and reveal to them the God whom they longed to know. The darkness of sin still lures your children from the path of light. Reveal yourself to us again today in your Word and light our path with your truth so that we might prepare well for your coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. What did you do this week as a preparation for Christmas or as spiritual preparation for Jesus’ coming?
2. Can you recall one incident this week that gave you hope?

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

The symbolic phrases in this reading refer to Ahaz, a descendant of King David, but a weak king. Ahaz was ruler in the southern kingdom, Judah, which was being threatened with annihilation at the hands of the powerful Assyrian empire. Isaiah spoke God’s promise to the people that in the future another king, faithful to God’s covenant, would usher in an era of perfect peace. Christians see in these words a foreshadowing of the Messiah.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Who was Jesse? (see 1 Samuel 16) To what, then, do you think the “stump of Jesse” refers?
2. Which two words in the reading would identify the hallmarks of this future person’s life?
3. According to verse 2, from where do the qualities come that will enable this future king to do such good things – and us, too, for that matter?
4. Is the perfect peace of verses 6-8 even possible? How do you interpret these much-loved verses?
5. Which words are God’s reminder to the Jews that they are meant to be a beacon of holiness that attracts non-Jews to faith in God as well?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Romans 15:4-9

In this passage, Saint Paul was addressing tensions between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians within the Church at Rome. As difficult as it was for Saint Paul to understand why any Jew would not recognize Jesus as the Messiah for which they had waited so long, it was equally difficult for him to understand why all believers would not accept one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Advent theme, for us, is in Saint Paul’s encouragement to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ and live in hope, in constant readiness for His return.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Can you find 3 phrases in the reading that hint at the Jewish-Gentile tensions which St. Paul is addressing?
2. According to verse 4, what is the value of the Old Testament (“Hebrew Scriptures”) for us Christians?
3. Does verse 8 maintain that Jesus came to put an end to the Old Testament relationship between God and the Chosen People? If not, what did Jesus do to that covenant?
4. Using St. Paul’s own words from this reading, how were the people to deal with divisions that occasionally occur within a parish or the Church as a whole?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:1-12

On the Second Sunday of Advent we always hear one of the Gospel accounts about Saint John the Baptist. The word “repent,” as the Baptist used it, means more than being sorry for one’s sins and asking forgiveness. It means literally “to think in a different way,” a complete turning around in a new direction. At the same time, his message was one of hope: “the Messiah is near and it is *not too late* to change from your sinful ways of acting.”

Read the Gospel Reading out loud.

1. Which phrase caught your attention in this reading? Comment if you wish.
2. In what way would the Baptist’s physical appearance have contributed to the sternness of his message?
3. Why would Saint John have called for repentance from Pharisees, who prided themselves on following scrupulously every written or traditional law, and from the Sadducees, who called for strict faithfulness to all rituals and to exclusion of all who were not part of the Chosen People?
4. Look up James 2:14. Which words of this Gospel reading echo the same message?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Do John the Baptist's words prepare us to welcome a baby in a manger or something else? Explain.
2. Jesus objected to focusing only on strict obedience to all religious laws. What danger or possible sin did He see in doing so? Is that ever something you catch yourself doing?
3. Is there any aspect of your life that truly needs a turning around – perhaps not 180°, but maybe 45°?
4. Commentators say that these three readings all proclaim a message of hope; what is the message of hope that you see in each one now?
5. What gives you hope that any kind of true peace and harmony can become possible in our world?
6. To whom could you extend a welcome of hope in a way that the person would feel more a part of Church?
7. The First Reading spoke of believers being beacons that attract others to faith in God. How can we make that a part of our life this week? And, what does that have to do with Advent?

Closing Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus; do not delay! Help us to think differently so that we recognize your presence in each person or situation that we encounter. Help us also to live differently, so that each day we are preparing for the day when you call us to give an accounting of our life of faith. Send us your Spirit, Lord. We ask this in your name, for you are God who reigns forever. Amen.