



Sunday Mass Preparation Guide

Including

The Readings

**First Reading
Responsorial Psalm
Second Reading
Gospel**

Study Guide

**Study Guide including Background on Readings
And Thought Questions**

In-Depth Reflection

**A Thought-Provoking Written Analysis on
One of the Readings**

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB » Bible » Daily Readings

DECEMBER 3, 2017

First Sunday of Advent

Lectionary: 2

Reading 1

IS 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7

You, LORD, are our father,
our redeemer you are named forever.
Why do you let us wander, O LORD, from your ways,
and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes of your heritage.
Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
with the mountains quaking before you,
while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for,
such as they had not heard of from of old.
No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you
doing such deeds for those who wait for him.
Would that you might meet us doing right,
that we were mindful of you in our ways!
Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful;
all of us have become like unclean people,
all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
we have all withered like leaves,
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.
There is none who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to cling to you;
for you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us up to our guilt.
Yet, O LORD, you are our father;
we are the clay and you the potter:
we are all the work of your hands.

Responsorial Psalm

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

R. (4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.
O shepherd of Israel, hearken,

from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.

Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,

and protect what your right hand has planted
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;
give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

R. Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Reading 2

1 COR 1:3-9

Brothers and sisters:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always on your account
for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus,
that in him you were enriched in every way,
with all discourse and all knowledge,
as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you,
so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift
as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He will keep you firm to the end,
irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
God is faithful,
and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Alleluia

PS 85:8

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

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

MK 13:33-37

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!"

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THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Cycle A – The Year of Matthew

The Liturgical Year

The Liturgical Year is the way Mother Church places before us the main events and teachings in the life of Jesus. When we remember the events and stories in the life of Jesus, we make them as real to us as they were to those who first experienced them. We bring past events into the now. Thus, the Liturgical Year is not an historical look at past events, but the way that our Church invites us to enter and experience Christ who continues to be present and active in the events of our lives in the here and now.

Cycle A – The Year of Matthew

Our liturgical calendar has three cycles: A, B, and C. A new cycle of readings begins each Advent. This year, we will be listening mainly to the Gospel according to Matthew. During the seven Sundays of the Easter season, we will be hearing the Good News according to St. John.

The authors of *Living Liturgy 2011* offer the following helpful introduction to the Gospel of Matthew.

*What each gospel writer put into his account was governed by the needs, the problems, and the trials and challenges of the community for which they were writing. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written by a Jewish scribe, a person who was very familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures. He was writing for the Jewish followers of Jesus who had continued to attend the synagogue regularly – their religion was still the Jewish religion, with belief in Christ and his teachings a further revelation of their inherited beliefs and traditions. Then around the year AD 70 (when the city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Romans and the Pharisees took over as the ruling group), the Jewish Christians were expelled from the synagogue and treated like enemies of the Jewish God. These Jewish Christians did not understand why God had allowed their city and temple to be completely destroyed so that “not a stone remained on a stone.” They were told by these same Pharisee leaders that not only was Jesus of Nazareth not the Son of God but he was a sinner who violated the Sabbath and other Jewish practices. Matthew “answers” this charge by **presenting Jesus as the new Moses** who, for example, came out of Egypt to lead his people and who gave a new covenant on the Mount of the Beatitudes.*

Matthew’s gospel addresses these issues in an anecdotal literary form. Matthew presents Jesus by having him do “Moses-like” things. Like Moses, he comes into Israel from Egypt to lead the people out of slavery. Like Moses, he goes up on a mount to give the people new rules of behavior (the Beatitudes). He is the Son of God who, like Moses, had miraculous powers (for Jesus, especially, to heal, cure, and forgive), and who brought hope to many people. Unlike Moses, he is also the Messiah who would be tortured and killed but who would rise from the dead and whose Spirit would continue to live in those who follow him. This Jewish Scribe gospel writer backs up what he says about Jesus by frequently quoting passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, passages that foretold the different things that would happen to the Messiah – things that did not always fit the image of the messiah that the people had....

...Matthew’s gospel begins with a statement from Isaiah: “Emmanuel...God is with us” (1:23). The gospel ends with a similar statement of God’s continuing presence – after the resurrection the gospel writer brackets the entire story when he records Jesus’ final words: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (28:20). Matthew’s gospel invites us to hear and believe the word of God, beginning with the apostles and continuing down to us and to the end of time. We are to open ourselves to God’s continuing presence – “Emmanuel...God is with us...always, to the close of the age.” Jesus’ “great commission” (28:19-20) makes clear that we who hear and believe are invited to go out and share this marvelous Good News with “all nations.”

The Advent Season

We begin the Church’s “Year of Grace” with the season of Advent, a time when the Church focuses first on the Lord’s coming at the end of time, then on his coming in history through his miraculous birth through the Virgin Mary. That mysterious birth unfolds during the Christmas season revealing its meaning for our salvation over the course of a series of feasts that include the Holy Family, Mary, Mother of God, Epiphany, and Baptism of the Lord. Each Sunday of Advent/Christmas, and each text on any given Sunday, is a doorway into the world of God’s unbounded love, a love revealed in the Word-made-flesh, the Word made present throughout all of history each and every time the Church proclaims “The word of the Lord!”

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

November 27, 2016 A

Opening prayer: *God of history, present, past and future, be with us as we begin our Advent journey in this new liturgical year. Make us aware of your presence in one another and in all creation. Prepare us to celebrate your birth and to anticipate your coming at the end of time. Protect us from deeds of darkness and shed your light upon us. Help us to be spiritually awake to your comings in the events and encounters of daily life. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What do you like and dislike most about this season of the year?

Facilitator reads focus statement: This weekend we begin a new Liturgical Year with the Advent/Christmas season. Four weeks of *Advent* prepare us to celebrate the First Coming of Jesus in Bethlehem. But they also urge us to be ready for his Second Coming and for his comings into our daily lives. During the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, we celebrate the manifestation of Jesus to the Jewish and Gentile world.

In this week's Gospel and second reading, we observe a strong note of urgency concerning *readiness* for Christ's Second Coming. In the first reading, Isaiah offers a *word of hope* to his people who are living through a very difficult time.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider going over the commentary after each reading, if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah lived at a time when Israel was divided into two kingdoms—both of which were being threatened by the powerful Assyrians.

Commenting on today's first reading, the authors of *Living the Word 2014* write:

Today's first reading introduces the vision of God for Jerusalem as recounted by the prophet Isaiah. During the eighth century BCE (before the Common Era), Isaiah, a court prophet serving under the kings of Judah, announced numerous oracles indicting Jerusalem for its moral decline. The nation is filled with "people laden with wickedness, evil offspring, and corrupt children! They have forsaken the Lord, spurned the Holy One of Israel, apostatized" (Isaiah 1:4). But God anticipates a better future, a time when the house of Jacob will walk in the light of the Lord and nations will stream to the city of Jerusalem. The once unfaithful people will beat their swords into plowshares and peace will reign (Isaiah 2:4).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 122

In this song of joy and praise, the pilgrim proclaims the centrality of Jerusalem in Israel's life.

SECOND READING: Romans 13:11-14

We detect here a note of urgency, as with Jesus in today's Gospel. Even though Paul is writing to a Christian community which has accepted Christ, their total conversion to his ways is far from complete. Hence, he urges them to "throw off deeds of darkness,"—naming six such deeds—and to put on "the armor of light."

During this season of Advent, the Church urges us to do the same. We too must look into our hearts and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, name those things in our lives that are preventing us from a wholehearted commitment to Jesus.

GOSPEL: Matthew 24:37-44

Jesus instructs his disciples on the importance of readiness for his *Second Coming*. To drive home his lesson, Jesus draws on what happened to the people who did not prepare for the Great Flood. They knew it was coming but they were so consumed with the affairs of everyday life that they failed to prepare. One exception was Noah who did get ready and was saved.

Like Noah we, as followers of Jesus, should be prepared for his Second Coming. The reference to the "two men" and "two women" is one of contrast. Externally, they seem alike, but internally, one is

prepared for God's coming and the other is not. The clear message in this Gospel is: "Be ready!"

By selecting this reading for the first Sunday of Advent, the Church urges us to live our lives in *readiness* for the Lord's coming at the end of time, whether that *end time* is the culminating event of our individual lives or of all of human history.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you most? Why?
2. Why do some people think that "weapons of war" are the only way or *main way* to achieve peace?
3. What can help you to "stay awake" to Christ's comings in our daily life?
4. Name ways that can help you to live vigilantly.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

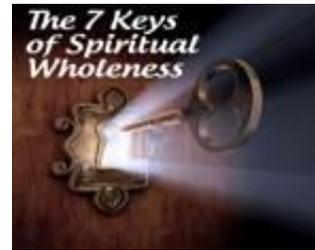
Name one way you can act on this Sunday's Word. Suggestion: If there is conflict and unforgiveness in your life, consider preparing for the coming of the Prince of Peace by turning your "sword into plow-share" and by trying to create an atmosphere of peace.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for the grace to know what attitudes and spiritual exercises can help you to stay awake to God's presence and activity in your life. Pray for our leaders that they may find peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. ©

Begin the New Year Energized!

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Holy Name of Jesus Parish Indialantic, FL

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OPEN SOME DOORS THIS ADVENT

Reflection for First Sunday in Advent

This weekend we once again begin a new liturgical year with the holy season of Advent, which prepares us to celebrate the coming of Jesus. Advent is very much about opening the doors of our heart to Jesus. The following reflection on Advent was written by Sr. Joyce Rupp—a very popular writer and speaker.

*Advent is a season of opening doors. It is a time to deepen and strengthen our relationship with the Holy One so that more of the divine presence within us shines through and offers a welcome to others. It is a season to open the doors of our hearts so that we can both give and receive this love. One of the ways we can do this is by **seeing ourselves and others as doors** through which the divine presence continually seeks an entrance.*

Someone's Knocking

Each of us has a sacred door. It is the place where we meet the Holy One in our midst. In Warner Sallman's artistic portray of Revelation 3:20, Jesus stands at the door and knocks. It is the door of the human heart to which Jesus comes and awaits an invitation to enter. Sallman knowingly omitted the doorknob on the outside, recognizing that the door to the heart can only be opened from within. The knobless door indicates that we hold the power of welcome or refusal. It is our choice.

*The movement of greeting someone at a physical door is much like the process of spiritual growth. We must first be aware that there is someone actually at the door. Sometimes there is a gentle rap, at other times a very loud knocking or a melodious doorbell. **Attentiveness and listening are essential to the spiritual life. Advent is a wake-up call, alerting us and challenging us to become more aware of the divine visitor who faithfully knocks at the door of our lives.***

The metaphor of the door in scripture encourages this alertness and wakefulness. In Proverbs, Holy Wisdom speaks: "Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors" (Prov. 8:34). In similar fashion the lover describes attentiveness to the Beloved: "I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking. 'Open to me...'" (Song of Sol. 5:2).

Readiness to open the door is essential for a meeting to occur. Attentiveness to the divine presence is a must. This is the reason why busyness can be destructive to our Advent experience. Being busy in itself is not a bad thing, but it is detrimental when it keeps us from being ready to open the door or from recognizing that someone awaits our welcome.

***Once we are aware of someone waiting at the door we must decide whether to open it.** How do we respond when someone knocks or rings the doorbell of our house? Our response can be much the same as when someone stands at the door of our heart. At first, we may be cautious, peering carefully to see who it is. We might feel irritated when the knock comes, believing we have no time to answer to door or doubtful that our house is clean or beautiful enough for a welcome. We may be guarded and hesitant with fear, or curt and abrupt, taking care of business quickly. We might even ignore the sound at the door completely.*

On the other hand, we could be waiting for someone we know and appreciate, like the watchful servants in the parable "who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks" (Luke: 12:35). In this case, we might be elated when we see who is there, knowing the one at the door is a friendly neighbor or a loved one who will ease our loneliness and anxiety or gift us with the goodness of his or her presence. ("The most exquisite fruits are at our doors." Song of So. 7:14.)

How we welcome other human beings into our lives is how we welcome Emmanuel, god-With-Us (Matt. 25:31:46). In my travels I spend a lot of time in other peoples' space. I notice how I am met at the door of their homes. Usually, there is only glad welcome and generous hospitality extended to me. But sometimes people welcome me with their words and not with their hearts. It is obvious that I am an interruption or an intrusion into their well-ordered lives. I

sense their anxiety and concern about doing things right or “looking good”. They apologize profusely about their unclean or crowded space or simply usher me to my room without the warmth of welcome.

Please Disturb

Hospitality is at the heart of the Advent season. In her book, ***The Reed of God*** (Sheed & Ward), Caryll Houselander describes the Annunciation as the Spirit tapping on the door of Mary’s heart: “It was as if the human race were a little dark house, without light or air, locked and latched. . . But one day a girl opened the door. Seas of light swept through it, and the light remained in it; and in that little house a Child was born.”

Mary was a beautiful, faith-filled door. When the divine visitor tapped on her heart, she was at first hesitant and afraid. Full of questions and concerns, she paused for clarity before she opened the door. But she did not let her hesitations keep her from extending a welcome to love. With her “Yes, you may come in,” Mary created a hospitable space within herself. She leaned on her faith for support as she opened the door wide to the Spirit. Because of her hospitality to divine mystery, Jesus entered this world through the door of her welcoming womb (Luke 1:26-38).

Mary is every person who has stood at the door and felt fearful of the future with its unknown direction. She is every person who has experienced self-doubt or has had a totally unexpected event upset them. She is each of us struggling with our own fears and hesitations when the Holy One taps on the door of our life asking for an entrance.

Our fears can keep us from opening a door that needs to be opened. There’s often a price to be paid for being open: confusion, doubt, uncertainty, unsettledness, the possibility of being hurt by what others say or do to us. Opening the door to another may cost us our precious time and energy. We may have to “go the extra mile”. Yet, in the end, as with Mary, we receive so much more than we have given. It must also be said that at times our fears can protect us by refusing to open a door to someone or something that is not good for us (Discernment is crucial.)

Sometimes opening the door of our hearts comes easily for us. Elizabeth opened wide the door of her home and of her generous heart. Her hospitality to Mary was boundless. She extended total receptivity to her young, pregnant relative who carried the Christ within her. Joy filled the older woman when she heard Mary’s voice greeting her. As Mary entered Elizabeth’s home, Elizabeth was so excited and filled with love that the babe within her womb leapt for joy (Luke 1:39-45). In contrast, Zachariah refused to open the door of his heart by disbelieving the power and mystery of the divine (Luke 1:5-21; 57-80).

We have all closed the door to our heart at certain times. We shut our inner door to the Holy One when we refuse the truth, love, and goodness that is offered to us in times of discouragement and difficulty. We refuse to open the door when we choose to be alienated from others or from ourselves. We keep out love when we bar the door to those who need our kindness and compassion. Each time we find ourselves closed or blocked, it is a call to sweep out whatever keeps us from receiving our divine guest.

Our Inner Doors

The physical doors of our everyday lives can remind us to be aware and open to the Holy one who awaits our welcome in whatever form that might be. What does the door of our heart look like? Is it transparent glass? Can people see into our hearts and find authenticity there? Perhaps our door is made of heavy thick wood or metal, very sturdy but also serving as a strong barrier. The door to our heart might be a flexible gate or an easily moveable door, able to welcome people of other ideas, faiths, and cultures without alarm. At another time our heart could be a revolving door without direction, constantly going around in circles.

Sometimes we can tell the quality of our welcome by the message that hangs on the door of our heart. It might say something like “Enjoy Your Stay” or “Room Service” or “Enter at Your Own Risk” or “Do Not Disturb” or “No Trespassing”.

It is in our most ordinary moments that the Holy One stands at the door, startling us with hope. Advent encourages us to be ready to hear the knock on the door and to welcome his loving presence ever more fully. Each physical door we enter or pass through during Advent can remind us that each coming and going of our daily routine is an opportunity

to meet God-With-Us. It is up to us to welcome Emmanuel. The Key is in the lock. The divine visitor is at the door. We need only to open it wide with our welcome.

You may have read the above beautiful column rather quickly. I suggest this coming week that you make time to re-read it slowly and meditatively, pausing to reflecting on those thoughts that especially spoke to you. Then you might ask yourself the following questions:

- What spoke to you most in the article?
- What does the article ask of you during this Advent season?
- To whom or what do you need to open your heart more fully?