

Meditations: Sunday of the First Week of Advent (Year B)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer as we begin the season of Advent.

- Beginning again each day
- Supported by God's grace
- Converting anew

WE BEGIN today the season of Advent, a time of waiting since we know that Jesus' arrival is near. This Sunday's liturgy invites us to consider our own life in this light: "Grant your faithful, we pray,

almighty God, the resolve to go 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.”^[1] —

Our entire life is a time of waiting until that great day when Jesus will come to take us to Himself.

Therefore, as preparation for this encounter, the wisdom of the Church urges us to beg God for a greater desire to do good.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus tell us: *Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near* (Lk 21:28). God gave us this world as our inheritance. He wants us to dedicate ourselves to caring for it, and encourages us to sow good in our own lives and in the people around us. One day – we don't know when – our Lord will return. What joy we will bring to Christ's heart when we go out to meet him

that day! Until that time comes, we want to be vigilant, because we do not know either the day or the hour.

In Jesus' presence we can consider the trust God has shown us by letting us share in his mission. This Advent can be a good opportunity to consider anew the mission our Lord has entrusted to us and how we are carrying it out. Perhaps, along with gratitude for so many joys, we will realize that we have left some responsibilities unfulfilled. Today we can decide to start over again, following Saint Josemaría's advice: "To start anew? Yes, to start anew. In my case (and I imagine the same thing happens to you), I start anew every day, every hour, every time I make an act of contrition I begin again."^[2] —

BUT STAY awake at all times, praying (Lk 21:36). It may seem to us that our Lord's exhortation in today's Gospel has an overly urgent tone. But isn't it true? Life is short; time passes very quickly and it can happen that, due to the frenetic pace with which we often live, central aspects of our existence are left aside. Our Lord wants to be with us. He wants us never to forget Him, and so He calls us again and again. The invitation to watch is an expression of this desire on God's part. He wants to wake us up if we are spiritually drowsy or distracted by a myriad of concerns that seem more important. Jesus invites us to savor once again what is truly essential in our life.

“Stay awake.” Our Lord lovingly calls us to renew our desire for holiness, to turn back to God in whatever area we need to. Saint Paul, in the second reading of the Mass, reminds us that this work of our holiness does not

depend only on our own efforts, on our own determination, but rather it is a work of God: *may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all (1 Thess 3:12).*

Divine help has been granted to us; it has enriched our life. Jesus calls us to communion and, surprisingly, He offers himself to us as a gift to attain that new life. As we prepare outwardly and inwardly for the birth of the Christ Child, we can consider these truths. Our Lord wants to fill us with his grace: with his love, mercy, tenderness, humility, strength, knowledge... This season of Advent, a time of waiting, is an opportunity to open ourselves to God's grace, to welcome it wholeheartedly.

OUR LIFE is a wonderful gift from God. During Advent, a time of special

grace, the Church reminds us again and again of this truth: God is worth more than all those other things that can smother or restrict our love, things that ultimately harm and hold us hostage. “In a society that often thinks too much about well-being, the faith can help us to raise our eyes to a higher reality and discover the true dimension of our own existence. If we are bearers of the Gospel, our passing through this world will be fruitful.”^[3] Raising our eyes, rediscovering the true dimension of our life, leaving a mark and bearing fruit in our passage through this world: here we have a good program for Advent. With the desire that it may become a reality in each one of us, we ask our Lord with words from the Psalm: *Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths (Ps 25:4).*

Conversion is above all a grace: it is light to see and strength to want to. We want to look on the face of God so

that He will save us. We know that our limitations will not hold us back, since we find our support in God's infinite strength. Lord, we put our trust in you. We need to tell Him this sincerely, because God is very respectful of our freedom and waits for us to let Him enter into our life. If we ask Him, if we listen to his words and try to put them into practice, if we leave the most difficult tasks in his hands and try to carry out those within our reach, we can be certain that He will grant us his light and his strength.

Heeding our Lord's advice to be ever vigilant, we want to always keep our love alive, even when sometimes fatigue makes itself felt. Our Lady lived with great vigilance and expectation during the months of our Lord's gestation. Mary will help us to stay awake with joyful expectation, starting anew whenever necessary, until the arrival of our Jesus.

^[1] Roman Missal, First Sunday of Advent, Collect prayer.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, Scepter, p. 45.

^[3] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, article “Light To See, Strength To Want To,” 18 September 2018.

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