

# Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Advent, Cycle B

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120323.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Is 63:16b-17;19b;64:2-7*

The first reading today is composed of selections from a psalm prayer, a song, probably composed toward or at the end of the Babylonian exile. The Hebrew people recognize their sinfulness, the fact that they have turned away from God, as the reason life has become chaos and they beg God to take action. Note that they ask Him to rend the heavens and come down; to make himself present to them.

## **2nd Reading:**

Our 2nd reading comes from the greeting portion of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Note his reference to the spiritual gifts they have received which confirmed his teachings and will help them persevere as they wait for the 2nd coming of Christ.

## **Gospel:** *Mk 13:33-37*

**Jesus said to his disciples: "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. Mk 13:33**

## **Gospel Reflection**

When I was in Viet Nam, I spent six months in the field as an infantry platoon leader, and six months in the rear with a desk job. I have a picture of myself taking a nap, right on top of my desk. I wouldn't have wanted our commander to come in and see me like that.

In the evenings, during that period, I oftentimes had to check the perimeter guards. I drove around to make sure that they were at their posts and were awake and watching. It is pretty boring to spend two hours looking out over the night terrain. It's hard to stay attentive and it's hard to stay awake.

But this Gospel selection isn't about that. In Viet Nam we were watching for someone to arrive and, if they did, then all the action would begin taking place. We were trying to be prepared for that eventuality. In our Bible story, the action takes place before the owner arrives. The action is part of the wakefulness.

It seems to me that the message here is to be aware of and attentive to what we are doing. Be aware of the fact that we are doing the task the Lord placed us in charge of. Be attentive to how we are carrying out that task. Even though we are given the freedom to carry out the task as we see fit, it has to be done in a manner that is oriented toward accomplishing the Lord's goal.

So what is this great task the Lord has put me in charge of and what is the goal? It is the same for all of us. We have been put in charge of continuing the work Jesus did when he walked the earth. We are in charge of being God's love to each person who crosses our path, of carrying out the Law of Love. The Goal is for people to experience God's presence in their interaction with us

We should be carrying out this task of being God's love for others in everything we do, from the biggest thing to the smallest, from the most important to the seemingly insignificant. We should be doing it when we are shopping. We should be doing it when we are at school. We should be doing it when we are relaxing. We should be doing it no matter what we are doing. This is how we stay awake; by being aware, even when we are doing the most insignificant things, that we should be doing it in a manner that brings God's love to people.

That is what the first reading was talking about when it says, "Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways." Remember in that reading the lives of the Hebrew people were chaos and they wanted God to rend the heavens and come down? They thought that if God would come down and be among them, they would live mindfully of him, and would live attentive to God's will. We see that happening at Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Mark; "On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. Mk 1:10

This happens every week for us. At Mass, Jesus rends the heavens and comes down, through the same Spirit. That is why we celebrate every week; we take in the Spirit of Jesus and then are sent out by the Deacon to be Eucharist to the world throughout the week. If we don't check in every week, we'll get distracted and become part of the chaos that was the reality for the Jewish people in the first reading. Our world is full of chaos today and if we are part of it, we won't be prepared when he comes. If we do participate every week, it helps us be mindful of him who left us in charge. It helps us be mindful while we are doing the work he put us in charge of.

OK, there is my pitch for participating in the Mass. I wish I could create spiritual pop-ups like those that try to grab our attention on our computers all the time. My spiritual pop-up would just be a reminder to you that whatever you are doing, you are doing it as a servant of the Lord and should be doing it mindful of that. Since I don't know how to create spiritual pop-ups, the Mass and a daily prayer life will have to be sufficient for you. Oh, and I'll pray for us too.

Good luck, and God bless you...

### **Personal Reflection:**

[Insert verse from Gospel related to reflection] [Insert reference]

### **Question:**

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

### **Alternative:**

Share about/Reflect upon your job. What helps you maintain an awareness that you should be doing you work to advance the goals of the organization you work for? If you have trouble with that, what can you do to help you maintain your awareness? What can you do to help you maintain your awareness that you are in charge of continuing Jesus' ministry?

### Verse by Verse:

Mk 13:33 "...You do not know when the time will come." | The time here refers to the end times. (UBSH) This sentence warns us to live as if the end could come anytime, to live in a manner that will cause us to be judged positively. (SP Mark)

Mk 13:34 "It is like a man traveling abroad..." | For the Christian first hearers of this Gospel the man is Jesus. For the Jewish hearers of Jesus, the man is God. (AYBC)

Mk 13:34 "...places his servants in charge..." | The authority given the servants here allows each some autonomy in carrying out their appointed job. (UBSH quoting La Grange)

Mk 13:35 "...you do not know when the lord of the house is coming..." The arrival of the Lord begins the last judgement. (SP Mark)

Mk 13:36 "...find you sleeping." | Of course, this doesn't mean that you shouldn't get needed rest. It seems to me that the problem with sleeping here is not that you didn't notice the owner coming but that you were sleeping when you were supposed to be doing your work. This is probably not about physical sleep but about spiritual sleep.

Mk 13:37 "What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'" | From the context, here, we are being told to do what the servants have been given authority to do and, at the same time, to do what the gatekeeper has been ordered to do. Instead of watchful waiting, this is watchful working.

The Jerome Biblical Commentary states that this statement indicates that Jesus is not just warning his own disciples but is talking to all people. (JBC) It indicates that he was definitely talking to the Jewish people who weren't his disciples. Sacra Pagina, on the other hand, notes that Jesus was talking to only four of his disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew. They say this statement means it is meant for all of his disciples, not just the four.

This ending to Chapter 13 is immediately followed by "The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time.", which begins Chapter 14. Passover was considered a "Vigil" waiting for God to take action to free his people from slavery in Egypt. It is called "a night of watching" in Exodus 12:42. (AYBC)

### Context of this Reading:

Chapter 13 of Mark begins a new section written in the apocalyptic style. It is often called the little Apocalypse. It includes:

1. Prediction of the destruction of the temple.
2. The signs of the end, in response to question by Peter, James & John.
3. The coming persecution during which they are not to worry about what to say.
4. The great tribulation with false messiahs and false prophets.
5. The coming of the Son of Man
6. The lesson from the fig tree -> watch for the signs

The need for watchfulness, today's reading which ends this chapter.

The next chapter, Chapter 14, begins the passion narrative.