

1st Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2009

“Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Luke 21: 36

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is giving his own worst case scenario advice to his followers. And he doesn’t just say, if you should find yourself in this situation, he tells them that they definitely will find themselves in this dire situation. He wants his listeners to treat this with the utmost seriousness. He tells his disciples that “People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

Jesus describes this dreadful event in language that was designed to have a dramatic effect on his listeners and lodge in their memories. What is important for us today is that Jesus offers his followers a survival strategy for all worst case scenarios. Jesus warns his followers not to lapse from their prayers or from confidence in him. Then, no matter how bad things get, the followers of Jesus can be sure that they will have eternal salvation. Jesus promises liberation for all who follow him.

All this talk about desperate times might seem a bit odd at the beginning of Advent. Why, when we are beginning our preparations for Christmas, has the Church decided to give us a gloom-and-doom Gospel reading? In Luke’s Gospel this passage is shortly before the Last Supper and the Passion narrative. So what does this have to do with Advent?

The Advent season has always had a dual focus. We prepare for Christmas, the celebration of Christ’s first coming. But we also think about the second coming of Christ, when God’s kingdom will finally be fulfilled and God’s plan of salvation for the whole of creation will reach its ultimate completion.

Today’s Gospel reminds us how much we need a savior – someone who can turn the most desolate of situations into a victory. Someone who can help us survive any worst case scenario. Someone who can provide

salvation when we most need it. Even the prophet Jeremiah, speaking about six hundred years before Jesus was born, recognized that this savior would come. So, we begin this Advent aware of our need for a savior and looking forward to the celebration of his coming at Christmas.

Readings:

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 www.usccb.org/nab/bible/jeremiah/jeremiah33.htm#v14

Psalm 25: 4-5, 8-9, 14(1b)

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm25.htm#v4

1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1thessalonians/1thessalonians3.htm#v12

Luke 21: 25-28, 34-36

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v25