Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church

communion | participation | mission

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2021

INTRODUCTION

We hope you enjoy this aid to your scripture reflection, alone or with others, during this Advent. Prayer is an integral part of our Synodal journey. This Advent why not take time to reflect on our Sunday Gospels. Take a moment to slow down in our busy world.

Lectio Divina is a practical approach to praying the scriptures. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *Lectio Divina* occurs "where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer." The three key moments of this approach to the scriptures are reading, reflection and prayer. We read the Word of God to understand it; we reflect on the Word to see how it can apply to our lives; we pray in order to be transformed by the Word.

These three "moments" of *Lectio Divina* can be summed up by three questions:

i. When we read, we ask: "What does the text say in itself?"
ii. When we reflect, we ask: "What does the text say to me/us?"
iii. When we pray, we ask: "What does the text lead me/us to say?"

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READ
REFLECT
PRAY

FIRST SUNDAY

LUKE 21:25-28. 34-36

READ

Your liberation is near at hand.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you

suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECT

In the Gospel of John (16:20), Jesus tells his disciples that they will weep while the world rejoices. The Lord anticipated that the demands of discipleship, coupled with the opposition of the world, would cause his followers much distress. Meanwhile, the world would rejoice in its own ways, esteem those who agreed with its philosophies and attitudes, turn false prophets into heroes, call good evil and evil good.

Discipleship is the source of the deepest possible joy, yet Jesus knows that as long as we are in the world, our discipleship must also be a series of crises. The world, however, does not know the goodness of God, the wisdom of his righteous demands, the nature of true freedom, the beauty of sacrifice. The world is 'free' of the burden of righteousness and, to that extent, it enjoys a kind of happiness that is not given to disciples.

The picture in today's Gospel is almost exactly the opposite. Now, while the world is being brought to its knees, it is time for disciples to stand erect. While the world is convulsed with dread and the fear of what is to come, disciples are to walk with confidence and to look forward to what God is bringing to pass. While the world's pleasures are a memory that brings only remorse, disciples can experience unbridled delight in the Lord. How these words resonate today. In our world shaken by this ongoing pandemic we, a

people of faith, the disciples of today are called to stand tall trusting in the Lord.

In the Gospel the Lord goes on to paint the situation of his disciples in even more vivid colours. It is precisely at the time when the joys and securities and hopes of the world collapse, that the disciple is invited to stand strong and with boundless confidence.

But even faithful disciples are flesh and blood; they too can be overcome by life's pleasures and anxieties. And so the Lord cautions them: 'Watch yourselves… Stay awake, praying at all times…' Here we touch on a central paradox of discipleship: the necessary co-existence of trust and mistrust, trust in the Lord and mistrust of ourselves. To be a follower of Jesus is to be stretched between these two poles, and to realize that mistrust of ourselves need never lead to despair when it is coupled with trust in the Lord, and trust in the Lord need never lead to presumption when it is accompanied by a healthy mistrust in ourselves.

PRAY

We thank you, Lord, for your promises and your wisdom. Help us to bear the burden of discipleship with generosity and love, and to stand with confidence in your presence. Our world and our culture constantly challenge our faith. With your help, we will not retreat into bitterness or fear, but continue to show the witness of a life that has been blessed by the Gospel. May this holy, joyful season of Advent be a time for praying with humility, and for confident anticipation of your victory. Amen.

Our Synodal Prayer: We stand before you, Holy Spirit, as we gather together...

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PRAYER FOR THE UNIVERSAL SYNODAL PATHWAY

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

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