

Starting Anew

I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Jer 33:14-16)

^{14*} The **days** are coming—oracle of the LORD—when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵**In those days**, at that time, I will make a just shoot spring up for David; he shall do what is right and just in the land. ¹⁶**In those days** Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; this is the name they shall call her: “The LORD our justice.”

THE FOCUS: The Day of Restoration

COMMENTARY

- The prophet Jeremiah prophesied during the Exile (also before the Exile).
- The Exile was a big blow to the Israelites who believed that God would not deliver them to their enemies, because God was always with them.
- V.14 speaks of the promise to be fulfilled by God himself.
- V.15 articulates the promise: to raise up for David a just shoot (a good leader, with quality).
- V.16 likewise says the promise: Judah, safe; Jerusalem, secure.

REFLECTIONS

In this Season of Advent, a time to prepare for Christmas, the Church calls us to repentance, to change ourselves, so that we can truly and worthily celebrate Christmas, the coming of the Lord.



The First Reading suggests that we should put our hope in the Lord who is now fulfilling his promise (to rejoice, to anticipate).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 25:4-5, 8-9,10,14)
TO YOU, O LORD, I LIFT MY SOUL

SECOND READING (1 Thes 3:12-4:2)

^{12d}May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, ^{13e}so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at **the coming of our Lord Jesus** with all his holy ones. [Amen.] ⁴Finally, brothers, we earnestly ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God—and as you are conducting yourselves—you do so even more. ²For you know what instructions* we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

THE FOCUS: The Coming of the Lord

COMMENTARY

- The text is chosen by the liturgists to be read in this season of Advent because it indicates the coming (advent) of the Lord.
- V.12 starts the text with a wish:
 - Love, increase and abound.
 - Love, universal, qualified by apostolic love of Paul and companions.
- V.13 speaks of the reason why their love should increase:
 - To strengthen your hearts;
 - To be blameless in holiness.
- 4:V.1 further suggests to the Christian readers how to prepare for the coming of the Lord:
 - To have a good conduct (behavior), to please God (to gain favor from God);
 - Paul also challenges them to do more (no status quo). It is more or less the same as v.12 when Paul says, “love, increase and abound...” Reflect on that “more” thing.

REFLECTIONS

The word “love” is the key to prepare. Not just “love” as usual, but increased (expanded), more encompassing, more embracing, more universal, egalitarian, not choosy love; apostolic love like that of Paul and companions. We should have this kind of love.

Another way to prepare is to be blameless. This is “love” negatively expressed. If you love, you cannot be blamed for anything that goes wrong. The ones to be blamed are usually those who do not have good intentions, those who are careless in their speech and manners, those who do not care for their brethren, friends and relatives.

GOSPEL READING (Lk 21:25-28, 34-36)

^{25s}“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves.” ^{26u}“People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens* will be shaken. ^{27v}“And then they will see **the Son of Man coming** in a cloud with

power and great glory. ^{28w}“But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

^{34a}“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise ³⁵like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. ^{36b}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.**”

THE FOCUS: The Coming of the Son of Man

COMMENTARY

- Vv.25 talks about the signs in the skies (sun, moon and stars) and on earth (seas, waves, flashfloods, tsunami).
- V.26 talks about reaction of people (fear).
- V.27 talks about the appearance of the Son of Man : with power and glory.
- V.28 talks about signs: extraterrestrial, terrestrial, Son of Man.
- Exhortation: Stand erect, raise your heads (be not afraid).
- Reason: His coming = redemption.
- V.34 warns against improper behavior: carousing, drunkenness, anxieties; these cloud the heart.
- V.34 also informs the readers that the day will be sudden.
- V.35, No one will be spared of its dread.
- Therefore, another exhortation: be vigilant, pray.
- Reason: to have strength to escape tribulations and stand before the Son of Man.

REFLECTIONS

The Gospel Reading does not mean to scare us, but to encourage us. It presents to us, in the best of the author’s ability to portray the coming of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the center of our lives and the center of the universe (cosmos). His coming

deems fit to be accompanied by sound and visual effects, better than those done by computers. The author's presentation is much better than those of movie producers, better than Star Wars. With such global and cosmic disturbances, Jesus will not escape notice by anyone. Truly he will be recognized by everyone.

When we celebrate Christmas, we must be healthy, prayerful, thankful and prepared, undistracted to enjoy the coming of Jesus in our hearts.

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR SHARING/HOMILY

The First Reading announces the coming of the Lord who will restore the demoralized Israelites. Therefore they **should rejoice**. The Second Reading exhorts early Christians to prepare for the coming of the Lord, by increasing **their love**. The Gospel Reading exhorts us **to be prepared and pray and avoid evil**, always, for we do not know when the Lord is coming, but is definitely coming.

How to develop our homilies/reflections

Begin by describing what you do when you are expecting a visitor: cleaning the house, arranging things, making things presentable, keeping junks out of sight, repainting, refurbishing, etc.

Advent is a time to prepare our personal selves for the coming of our Lord (three comings: his birth, his presence today, and his second coming).

“How to prepare” according to the Readings? The First Reading invites us to be trustful in the promises of God (peace, justice, security, restoration to original dignity). The Second Reading invites us to give our best shot (expand our love, not to engage in immoral and illicit activities). The Gospel Reading invites us to be vigilant, to

be strong, to be prayerful, to be able to welcome (to withstand) the coming of the Lord for He brings salvation.

Christians at this time must concentrate on their spirituality. What spirit preoccupies their daily activities?

The season of Advent invites us to look deeper into ourselves and think how we can relate with God better.

Alas, we are distracted by many concerns, which are legitimate in some way if done without exaggerations: exchange gifts, gift giving, wrapping gifts, sending Christmas cards, email card, texting, shopping for *noche buena*, parties here and there, hospitalization because of too much *lechon* and fatty foods. Those who can not give anymore just spend their time hiding from their *pamangkins and inaanak (nephews, nieces and godchildren)*.

No time for prayer, for recollections.

How can we enjoy Christmas without being spiritually prepared for it? How can it be meaningful?

Without spiritual preparation, celebration of Christmas becomes one of the social events, meaningless waste of money and time and resources, without spiritual benefit.

Let us not spoil our Christmas by squandering our advent time for social and commercial activities.

In this time of Advent, we must strive to join a special spiritual activity (recollection in the evening, spending more time in the chapel, visit to the Blessed Sacrament, more budget for the poor children, visit the sick, etc. Make New Year's resolutions now, not on New Year!

-Prepared by Fr. Cielo Almazan, OFM

III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Today is Catholic Handicapped Day and National AIDS Day.

2. What's my Advent's wish? (HM)