

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

YEAR B

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

God,
you love us so much
you want to be among us and
share your life with us.
Make us ready
to welcome you
by following your ways
and living at peace
with one another.
We ask you to do this
through Christ our Lord.

FOCUS OF THE READINGS:

Our God is coming! Stay awake!
Be ready!

Culturally we are accustomed to thinking of all of Advent as preparing for the birth of Jesus. But liturgically we find a quite different emphasis. Only the Gospel of the fourth Sunday of Advent focuses on the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. The first Sunday reminds us of the coming of Christ at the end of time. The second and third Sundays focus on the acceptance of Christ in our lives today through baptism. It is this tension between the present and the future that gives meaning to the fourth Sunday and, indeed, to our celebration of the historical birth at Christmas.

Our first reading today tells us that, in spite of God's continued love and care, the chosen people have sinned, they have wandered away from their covenant relationship with their Creator. They cry out again for redemption.

FIRST READING: *Isaiah 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7*

This is a reading from the prophet Isaiah.

You, O God, are our Creator.

You have always been our redeemer,
our Savior.

Why do you let us wander from your ways,
and allow our hearts to turn away from you?
Oh, how we wish you would open the heavens
and come down to us.

You have already done mighty things for us;
things beyond our hopes and dreams.

No one has ever heard or seen
any God but you doing such things.

You do wonderful things
for those who trust in you.

You want to find us doing what is right,
following your ways.

But you are angry with us,
because we are sinful.

We have all done what is wrong.

We are weak, and we live in sinful ways.

We don't pay any attention to you
or pray to you.

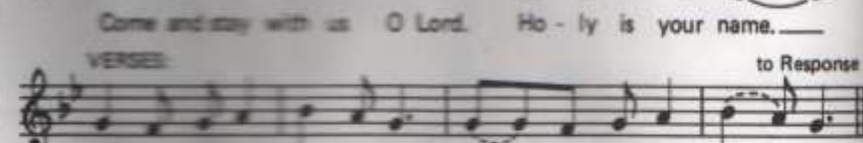
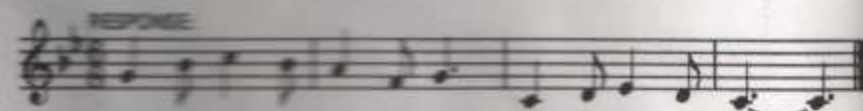
And yet, you are our Creator.

We are the clay and you are the potter.

We have all been made by your hand.

This is the Word of God.

RESPONSE: *Psalm 79*



1. God in heav-en, shine on us. You who are might-y, save ___ us.
2. Come our Sav-ior, stay with us. Come ___ and bring us back to you.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

"Stay a - wake, be read-y. You do not know the
hour when the Lord is com-ing. Stay a - wake, be
read-y." The Lord is com-ing soon!
Al-le - lu - ia, al-le - lu - ia! "The Lord is com-ing soon."

GOSPEL: *Mark 13:33-37*

This is a reading from the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus said to his disciples,

Always be ready!

Stay awake.

You do not know

when the special time will come.

Think about someone going on a long trip.

Before leaving, the owner of the house
puts the servants in charge of everything
and gives each one a special task.

One servant is told

to guard the door very carefully.

Pay attention!

You do not know

when the owner of the house is coming back.

It may be in the evening,

at midnight or early in the morning.

Do not let the owner come home suddenly
and find you asleep.

What I am saying to you,

I say to everyone:

Pay attention! Be ready!

This is the Good News of the Lord.

The Gospel focuses on the coming of Christ at the end of time and our need to be prepared. It was the constant warning of the early church: Christ will come again, but we do not know the time. Like the early Christians, we are called to love in such a way that we are always ready to greet the Lord at his coming. We too are urged to "stay awake, be ready!"

REFLECTING ON THE READINGS WITH CHILDREN:

Ask the children questions which will help them become aware that we usually prepare for events because we know the time they are expected. For example: we prepare for Christmas now because we know that Christmas is celebrated on December 25th. We prepare for a birthday party because we know the date of the birthday. But Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that we do not know the date when he will come again. He tells us that because we don't know the time, we must *always* be ready. Christians must always be ready to meet Jesus when he comes.

Ask the children how they think we can "always be ready"? What does Jesus mean, "be ready"? What would we want to be doing when Jesus comes? We can be ready by trying to live the way God wants us to, by praying and staying close to God, who made each one of us. Spend some time, if possible, on the image presented in the first reading: "We are the clay and you are the potter."

The children should leave today's liturgy believing that we are waiting for a day of joy and peace and that there are things we can do (on their level) to be ready for it. They should also be aware that even though we are not always perfect, God loves us and is always our Creator, the God who made us, the Redeemer and is with us to help us live as Jesus tells us to live.