

2024 C 1st Sunday of Advent Dec. 01

Today's gospel from Luke is a little unsettling. Christ seems to be describing **the end of the world**. Signs in the sun, moon and stars ... nations in anguish at the roaring and tossing of the sea ... people fainting from terror ... heavenly bodies shaken ... Hollywood would have a great time with special effects to portray that scene.

The natural events: Hurricanes, tornados, floods, wildfires in our lives give us a foretaste of the dramatic vision of the second coming of Christ. The challenge of Luke is-- **"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."

It's interesting. Most of us think of Advent as a special season in which the church prepares to celebrate the coming of Christ at Christmas. It is a season of joyous anticipation. But there is a Second Advent. On this 1st Sunday of Advent, we are reminded of it that is far more disturbing. It has nothing to do with snowflakes and visions of sugar plums dancing in our heads. "At that time, they will see the **Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory ...**"

When the prayer finished, 10-year-old Darren raised his hand in Sister Rita's religion class. The topic of the day was the Advent season. Darren asked, "Is Advent about the first coming of Jesus at Christmas, or his second coming at the end of the world?" Sr. Rita replied, "Both!" Then she added: "Let me explain. Even though it announces Jesus' birth, it also eagerly turns our minds towards the future when Jesus will judge the living and the dead." Darren responded, "Isn't that confusing?"

Sr. Rita answered, "We remember Jesus' birth to lift our minds and hearts to prepare now and not wait until it's too late. Darren sat down and thought about her response.

Coming of Christ in a cloud with power and great glory is intended to be mysterious. **Clouds are the biblical symbol of mystery and of the presence of God.** "He is coming with the clouds," says Revelation 1:17. "Lo, I am coming to you in a thick cloud," said God to Moses on mount Sinai. A familiar scene is the transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain. "A voice from the cloud said, **'This is my Son ...'**" These are mysterious words though for the modern world.

We hear much about the cloud nowadays. In today's world we associate the **cloud with our computers**. When tech companies say your data is in the cloud, or that you can work in the cloud, it has nothing to do with white fluffy things in the sky. Your computer data isn't actually in heaven. It's stored somewhere here, all over the world. Computer companies like Amazon and Google have built a vast network of servers housed in huge warehouses in the

size of football fields. That's where the cloud resides as far as computer users are concerned where computer companies keep their servers humming.

But the Word of God tells us that at the end of time Christ will come in a cloud it doesn't have anything to do with Internet or computers. **Google or Amazon won't own the cloud. God will control the cloud** and all the clouds Christ will reign over all. This is to say that **Christians ought to be excited about the future.** According to the Scripture, all creation groans, waiting expectantly to see not what tech companies will do next but what God is going to do next. **The future belongs to God.**

The people of Israel waited expectantly for the Messiah. The early church waited expectantly for Christ's return to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Christian life is expectant life. It is a life lived in anticipation that the promise of God will be fulfilled.

There is a story about a faith-filled and cheerful lady who was, nonetheless, a shut in, bedridden in a shabby room of a run-down building. She was alone. A Eucharistic minister from the church went to see her one day with one of her friends from a wealthy family. The wealthy lady was struck by the poverty and depressing condition there. But the shut in-lady's face was glowing to see her friend and she was radiating with the love of Christ in her heart. The wealthier lady said in a sympathetic way, not wanting to be mean, but kindly, **"It must be difficult for you living here like this."** **The Lady smiled knowingly and said, "Yes, but it's better higher up."**

That's the promise that Christians always live by. **"It's better higher up."** Who knows what grand thing God may be doing at this hour! Jesus says no one knows the hour. No one knows the mind of God, even the angels, but we keep trying. People are always looking for signs concerning Christ's return. We do not know when that time will be, but we live in anticipation that God will do a good work, that God fulfills his promise.

God's people have always taken comfort in the knowledge that whenever life grows uncertain, dangerous, or difficult, we can look to the clouds, as it were. **He does not forget or forsake us.** Ours is an expectant life, waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled, remembering that God does not forsake his own. And Advent is central to that reason. we keep vigilantly waiting for the majesty of the final victory of our life in anticipation and assurance.

It won't be Google's cloud or Amazon's cloud or Apple's cloud. It will be God's cloud and everything evil about this world will be swept away and only God's love and mercy will be left, and the children of God will have every tear wiped away and joy will reign over all.