

OPENING COLLECT

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Isaiah 64.1-9

1 O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence –
2 as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! 3 When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. 4 From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.
5 You meet those who gladly do right, those who remember you in your ways. But you were angry, and we sinned; because you hid yourself, we transgressed.
6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
7 There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.
8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.
9 Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD, and do not remember iniquity for ever. Now consider, we are all your people.

As we enter the season of Advent, our readings (set for Year B) inevitably focus on the action of God and the coming (advent) of the Messiah. Scriptural (or OT) passages speak to their own day but can be seen to point ahead to the moment of God's action. NT material helps us to see who the child 'born in a stable' really is, and challenges us to make his story, of God acting in love, known across the world. We start with a passage from Isaiah. The book of the prophet Isaiah falls into three parts. Chapters 1-39 are largely C.8th., 40-55 come from the C.6th. and the time of exile, and the rest, mostly, from the period after the return of the People of God from exile in Babylon. As first the Babylonians, and then the Persians, dominated their life, the people of God long for his intervention. "O that you would tear the heavens and come down" they cry, just as you did in the past. The absence of God from their lives is seen as due to their sinfulness. "We have become like one unclean"... "there is no one who calls on your name" (v.6-7). However, in the end, they say 'we are the clay' and the 'work of your hand', and the prophet pleads with God (v.9), "Do not be exceedingly angry, for we are all your people". So in the period leading up to the time of Jesus, they look forward and hope; hope that God will act for them.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1.3-9

My brothers and sisters: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among

Christians believe that this 'longing for God to act', seen in the passage from 3 Isaiah, above, was fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ. Yet their early writings, like Paul's letters to the Corinthians, do not see this as 'the end'. They also believed that Christ would come again, in glory (v.7), and 'on the clouds of heaven' (Daniel 7). So, on that day, the

you – 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the

Epistle continued:

revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

Gospel: Mark 13.24–37

Jesus said to his disciples: 24 'In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 Then they will see "the Son of Man coming in clouds" with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. 28 From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 32 But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.'

final day, the day of judgement, all must be found.

blameless (v.8). Hence Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians. The people of God have been enriched by the coming of Christ; enriched with spiritual gifts. They are now strengthened to live the Christian life, the life of love, about which he has much to say in his various letters to the young churches. We are as, he says elsewhere, to 'live in the Spirit' and not 'according to the flesh'. Or, we might say, picking up Gospel images from the last few weeks, we must use our abilities; we must trade with the talents of life and keep our lamps trimmed against the coming of the Bridegroom.

And when will that coming be? Of course we do not know, but that there will be signs is suggested in Mark 13, Mark's 'little apocalypse'. Several images from the Scriptures are picked up, images associated with the 'day of the Lord'. There will be a day of darkness (Micah 3); the Son of man will come in clouds (Daniel 7), and God's people will be gathered (Ezekiel 34). But, although there will be signs, and the attentive disciple should be able to read them as easily as one reads the seasons from the fig tree, actually no one knows the time of his coming! So, in the meantime, do not go to sleep on the job! It is not for us to know times and seasons, but simply to keep watching and to use all that we are given for the Kingdom, as we wait!

The final Collect says it all. Advent should help us to keep sharp. Watch, work and wait! This is a prayer worth repeating, at least Sunday by Sunday, in the Advent season: "make us watchful" and keep us "active in your service".

Post-Communion Collect:

O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**