



First Sunday of Advent
† Sunday 3rd December 2017

Day of Prayer for Migrants and Refugees
Cycle of Prayer: Openness to the word of God
Keynote: Stay Awake!

Prophet Isaiah 63: 16-17; 64: 3-8

Set in the early days of the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, here is a beautiful and poignant plea to God to reveal again that saving power that had first been shown to the People of God when they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. *'Lord, you are our Father, Our redeemer is your ancient name. Why, Lord, leave us to stray from your ways... to harden our hearts against fearing you?'* So then the prophet calls out, *'Oh! That you would tear the heavens open and come down... you guide those who act with integrity and keep your ways in mind. You were angry when we were sinners... we were like people unclean... our sins blew us away like the wind... and yet Lord, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.'* So the scene for this Advent season is set. For God's People await the return of Christ in judgement – wait for God to tear open the heavens and come down to reveal the Lord and Saviour who comes again.

Responsorial Psalm 79 (80) – a plea for God's favour and blessing

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 1: 3-9

In the typical classical style of a Greek letter of the time the apostle Paul praises his readers. But he offers the Christian community at Corinth 'faint praise' for their notoriously sinful behaviour as not being conspicuously evident of the Christian way of life. Then it is time for praise: *'I have never stopped thanking God,'* writes the apostle *'for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ. I thank him that you have been enriched in so many ways.'* Today, we can reflect upon the graces and opportunities that we, each of us, has been given by Christ. The question is, are we ready to account to the Lord, or indeed to the Christian community, for the use of these gifts? Is our behaviour consistent with our claim to be witnesses for Christ by calling ourselves Christians? How have we been using *'the gifts of the Spirit while we are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed?'* But Paul tells his fellow Christians at Corinth, *'(Our Lord Jesus Christ) will keep you steady and without blame until the last day – the day of Our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Gospel according to Mark 13: 33-37

Writing about the *Parousia* – the last things – Mark gives us the image of the faithful servant waiting ready and alert for the return of his master. Jesus says, *'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come.'* Yet for some reason, we find it so easy to imagine that there will always be time tomorrow to do what we might better undertake today. It is so easy to put off what must be done, to put off the radical change of life that is required if we are to fulfil our Christian calling. The words of Jesus are very apt for this Advent season, *'Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep... what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'*

© Peter J Harrison 2017

Note: Sunday Reading Cycle B; Weekday Reading Advent Proper Readings.