

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

By Al Mansfield

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24:37-44

### COME, WALK IN THE LIGHT

We have arrived at the First Sunday of Advent, the start of a new liturgical year. Advent is all about the Lord's coming - as a babe in Bethlehem, at the end of time, and here and now, by the grace and working of his Spirit. Today, the focus is more on the Second Coming of the Son of Man and our preparations for that. We are urged to "stay awake" and "walk in the light."

#### ISAIAH

Our first reading is from the prophet Isaiah, who describes the messianic kingdom in terms of "the mountain of the Lord's house," to which all the nations shall come.

The peoples of the earth will be drawn to the Lord's mountain, especially seeking his teaching: "For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

The Lord will "judge between the nations." And in this well-known and much-quoted passage, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again." This calls to mind the words of the old spiritual, *Down By the Riverside*, "I gonna lay down my sword and shield; I ain't gonna study war no more."

In order that this day of messianic peace may come, we must all "walk in the light of the Lord." The Responsorial, Psalm 122, calls for us to "go rejoicing the house of the Lord."

#### GOSPEL

Today's gospel reading from Matthew 24, part of the "Synoptic Apocalypse," puts us on notice. It is possible to get so caught up in earthly pursuits and the cares of this life that we neglect the coming of the Lord and his judgment.

This coming of the Lord will take place at our individual death (particular judgment) and also at the end of time (general judgment). In both cases, we know neither the day nor the hour.

The comparison of the Lord's coming to that of a "thief in the night" never ceases to be challenging and somewhat disturbing. No householder wants to think of his home being broken into while he is fast asleep! The Lord calls us to be ever watchful and prepared, walking in the light.

#### ROMANS

Our second reading from Romans is well known as the passage that St. Augustine read at the moment of his conversion. During a time of intense personal anguish, Augustine heard a child saying "take up and read." He opened the Scriptures at random and read from Romans 13:13-14: "Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."

In other words, walk in the light - not in the darkness! Augustine did so and became a Christian, a priest, a bishop, a theologian, a saint and doctor of the Church. This Scripture reading, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, worked a miracle of grace in Augustine's life. May it continue to do so for all who read or hear it!

## WAKE UP

Today's readings begin by describing the messianic kingdom on the Lord's mountain. The gospel is a word of warning to "stay awake" and be prepared for the Lord's coming. Our second reading also exhorts us to "awake from sleep." The reason given is that "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." Our response is to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and "walk in the light." May the Lord help to do so!