FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Advent begins in the dark, which can feel familiar to adult children of alcoholics or dysfunctional homes. Many of us learned to watch for changes in mood, anticipate conflict, and prepare for what might go wrong. Those habits once helped us survive, but they can keep us living ahead of the present.

As we approach the season of Advent, this Sunday's first reading gives voice to a different kind of longing. Isaiah cries out, *"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down"* (Isaiah 63:19). He does not deny how far the people have wandered, yet he remembers that God is still the potter and we are the work of His hands (Isaiah 64:7). Advent allows honesty and hope to remain together. We can acknowledge how deeply the past shaped us without assuming it has the final word.

This movement reflects Step Two. After admitting that our lives have become unmanageable, we come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. For adult children, sanity can mean learning that safety does not depend on reading every room correctly. It also means trusting God to care for us when we stop managing the emotions around us.

Fear often carries us into tomorrow. We imagine conflict before it happens or rehearse how we will respond if someone becomes upset. Shame pulls us backward, reminding us of moments when we froze, disappeared, or abandoned our own needs. Living one day at a time brings us back to the only place where healing can be practiced: today.

Sunday's gospel gives this practice a deeper meaning. Jesus tells His disciples, *"Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come"* (Mark 13:33). For those shaped by unpredictability, these words can sound like another demand to stay on guard. Yet Jesus is not asking us to remain tense. He is asking us to stay present to God and faithful to the life He has entrusted to us.

Spiritual alertness is different from hypervigilance. Hypervigilance assumes that constant monitoring will keep us safe. Spiritual alertness helps us notice when an old alarm has been activated and return to what is actually happening now. It gives us enough space to choose a response instead of automatically returning to an old role.

Step Two helps us believe that another way of living is possible before we fully know what it will feel like. We borrow hope from people who have learned to set boundaries without panic and receive care without immediately feeling indebted. Their experience shows us that recovery can become a new way of inhabiting the present.

Saint Paul reminds us that we are not waiting empty-handed. He tells the Corinthians, *"You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 1:7). God has already provided fellowship, prayer, and relationships where honesty is safe. We do not need to create security through perfect performance.

Paul then gives us the foundation beneath hope: *"God is faithful"* (1 Corinthians 1:9). Our healing does not depend on flawless awareness or on never being triggered again. It rests in the faithfulness of God, who continues reshaping us through ordinary acts of trust.

Advent reminds us that darkness is not evidence of God's absence. Christ is coming, and grace is already active. We do not have to predict what lies ahead or earn the right to feel safe. As we remain present to God and practice the next faithful response, watchfulness becomes less about guarding against danger and more about recognizing that we are no longer alone.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where is an old fear or family pattern pulling you away from what is actually happening in the present?
- How has Step Two, safe fellowship, or another person's example helped you believe that a different way of living is possible?
- What practice helps you return to the present when hypervigilance, shame, or fear of conflict begins to take over?

ADVENT MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Isaiah 63:16b–17, 19b; 64:2–7
RESP. PS. Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19
SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 1:3–9
GOSPEL Mark 13:33–37

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