



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent | Year B



Deftera Parousia (second Coming of Christ)  
Agios Panteleimon Monastery, Kloster, Heraklion Photo /Source: P. Vasiliadis



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: **Blessing of an Advent Wreath**

Before your group lights the first candle of the Advent wreath, the following blessing may be prayed.

Leader: The kingdom of God is at hand.

All respond: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Leader: Let us call to mind God's mercy and salvation as we wait in hope during the days and weeks of Advent. As we gather around this wreath let us remember God's promise to be with us until the end of time.

Scripture: Isaiah 9: 1-2a.

All respond: Thanks be to God.

After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercessions and in the Lord's Prayer.

Leader: Let us ask God to bless our wreath and to bless us.

After a short silence, the leader prays:

Heavenly Father,

We praise and thank you for the great gift of your Son  
Jesus, the Christ.

You sent him as a Light to the nations.

You sent him to reveal your Light and Love  
to a world darkened by sin.

Christ is our hope and our salvation.

Upon him we place all our trust.

He is Emmanuel, the promised Messiah.

He brings wisdom and peace to a troubled world.

Lord God,

bless this wreath and

bless those who gaze upon its light  
in hopeful anticipation.

Come, Lord Jesus, come in haste, come!

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The first candle is lighted.

Leader: Let us praise God, the ruler of the universe.

All respond, making the sign of the cross:

The God who made heaven and earth!

The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come O Come, Emmanuel"

Catholic  
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& Creed**  
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## Sharing Faith

### Liturgical Context

- ▶ Advent is a time not just of expectant waiting but of profound renewal.
- ▶ The cosmos joins the cries of human longing for the Christ—the One who came once in history, who comes each week in our hearts and who will come again at the end of time.
- ▶ There is a reminder of the judgment that awaits us all throughout the entire season.
- ▶ The symbolism of the Advent wreath reminds us of the tension between light and darkness. We are reminded of the darkness the earth once knew as it waited for the coming of the Light of the World—the Christ. A candle is lit each week illustrating the gradual increase of the Light that dispels the darkness.
- ▶ The Advent wreath cradles our primary symbols of wood and light. “The wood refers to the ‘living greens’ that are used to make the wreath. The wood or pine embodies the primary symbol of the cross. It is the wood of the cross which will become the sign of our salvation at Easter whereby all are saved by the ‘wood of the cross’. The four candles represent Christ, the Light of the World!”<sup>1</sup> Four purple candles, or three purple candles and one rose candle [for Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent], or four white candles may be used in the wreath.
- ▶ Mary slowly emerges as a primary character in the unfolding drama of the season. John the Baptist takes center stage as a primary player in the ethos of the season. One can almost hear his ancient cry, “Repent and change your lives!”
- ▶ Today we begin a new liturgical cycle: Year B. This is the year we hear the story of Christ from St. Mark’s perspective. Mark’s gospel is considered the first Gospel. His gospel takes us on a journey. His entire purpose is to prove that Jesus is the One sent from God. He is the Christ, the Messiah. From the very beginning of his Gospel he moves the listener/reader toward the pinnacle of the Christian kerygma culminating in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.
- ▶ We are reminded of the importance of the liturgical year. We are reminded that the entire mystery of Christ is made manifest to us in the liturgical year and that the primary truths of Christian faith are manifested throughout the seasons.
- ▶ Advent prepares us to encounter the truth, reality and dogma of the Incarnation that we will experience at Christmas.
- ▶ We remember three comings of Christ—the Christ who came once in history, the Christ who comes each day in our hearts and the Christ who will come at the end

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<sup>1</sup>Linda Gaupin, *Catechesis and Liturgy, Course Text*. 52.

of time.

- ▶ Salvation history is remembered and made present to us in our Advent liturgies.
- ▶ The season invites prayerful diligence as we remember what God has accomplished through his Son Jesus throughout human history, what he is doing now and what he will continue to do in our lives as we go about the business of building his kingdom on earth as we wait in joyful hope for the kingdom yet to come.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

### First Reading: Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

If time allows the catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings, simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **The people of Israel were returning from the Babylonian exile and were frustrated that their efforts to rebuild their lives were going so slowly. They wondered if God was punishing them for their sins. They longed to return to the intimate friendship they once had with God. They longed for God to restore the covenant the people ruptured by their sins.**

If time allows, here are the key points regarding this reading:

- ▶ The people are extremely downcast and depressed.
- ▶ Everything is in ruins.
- ▶ The people of Israel had returned from the Babylonian exile and found their homeland in ruins.
- ▶ They were extremely frustrated that efforts to rebuild their lives were going so slowly.
- ▶ The prophet reminds them in today's reading that they are powerless and their only hope is to put their trust in God alone.
- ▶ The people believed God was punishing them for their sins.
- ▶ They cried in desperation, "Did God desert us?"
- ▶ They had wandered away from the covenant God forged with them.
- ▶ Now they longed to return to the former days when they enjoyed an intimate friendship with God.
- ▶ They longed to once again allow God, like the Master Potter, to mold them into the people God wanted them to become.
- ▶ They understood God to be their redeemer. While we understand that role to be attributed to Jesus, their understanding of the word came out of their culture.
- ▶ A redeemer was a person who bought back a family member sold into slavery.
- ▶ People could also "redeem" an animal given for sacrifice by buying back the animal for a price. The redeemer married the widow thus insuring that the children they bore would continue the family line. A redeemer paid the debts of

family members who became destitute.

- ▶ The people of Israel believed God ransomed them from the exile.
- ▶ God simply took the first step in restoring the intimate relationship he once shared with the people he loved so much.



## Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ From what in your life right now do you need to be redeemed?
- ▶ Do we need a redeemer like the Israelites needed a redeemer? If so, what evidence is there today that we need a redeemer as much as they did?
- ▶ Do you think God punishes us for our sins?

### Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

If time allows the catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **Paul thanks the community for using their gifts to build and strengthen community life. He later chastises them for obsessing so much about their gifts that they forget what their focus should be.**

If time allows, here are the key points regarding this reading:

- ▶ Paul loves the people he formed as a community. He thanks them for sharing their gifts in the community. He thanks them for using the gifts of speech and knowledge that God gave them.
- ▶ God gifted the community with every gift they would need to strengthen and maintain community life.
- ▶ Paul later challenges the way the gifts are used, but he does recognize how important they are to building and strengthening the community.
- ▶ He invites the community to be diligent and avoid all temptation to sin as they await the Lord’s return.
- ▶ At one point they nearly forgot that the Lord would be returning. They became extremely obsessed and impressed with themselves over the charismatic gifts they used in their ministry to the community.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life.

- ▶ Where is the good news in this reading?
- ▶ What gifts do you possess?
- ▶ Are you willing to use your gifts?
- ▶ What would stand in the way of you using your gifts to build God’s kingdom?

### Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

#### Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

#### Abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel

- ▶ Today we hear the parable of the doorkeeper.
- ▶ The doorkeeper in the parable is Jesus.
- ▶ The warning has echoes of the last days, the end times, the afterlife. The term we use to describe such things is eschatology.
- ▶ The master puts the servant in charge of his property until he returns.
- ▶ The servant is then tested. The master delays his return.
- ▶ Jesus reminds them that the reign of God is not only a reality they are living in right now, but also a reality they await in the future.
- ▶ The master and servant relationship was often used to describe the way God was in relationship with the people of Israel.
- ▶ It is believed by some scholars that this parable was intended to prepare the people for future events.
- ▶ It reads like a farewell speech. It resembles all Biblical apocalyptic literature that speaks of the “end of days”.
- ▶ Mark’s community was experiencing turmoil. Jerusalem had fallen and Mark believed that Satan now ruled Israel.
- ▶ False teachers were not teaching the message of Jesus. Jesus preached a message of suffering; the false teachers preached another message altogether.

- ▶ Mark's intention in telling this parable of Jesus' is to remind the people to be ready for Jesus' return that was expected soon and not to be taken in by every false prophet pretending to preach the Good News.
- ▶ The evangelist's message to the community is vigilance—do not be complacent-- be ready for the Lord's return at all times.
- ▶ Hope in the Lord's return is what Christians of all generations need to strengthen them as they await his coming.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

## Further elaboration of the Gospel

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this parable for our reflection.
- ▶ This parable is put in a category of parables referred to as *departure/return parables*.
- ▶ The people of Jesus' time had little appreciation for future events. They lived in the present, yet hints of future were evident.
- ▶ Thus the Gospels that are proclaimed at the beginning of each new liturgical cycle are taken from gospels with a future oriented focus. Such literature is referred to as apocalyptic.
- ▶ All apocalyptic material in the synoptic Gospels—Mathew, Mark and Luke—end with a series of parables that have to do with last things and the end of time.
- ▶ Cultural biblical studies have shown us that the culture at the time of Jesus was a client/patron system of organizing the culture.
- ▶ Our culture is a capitalist system; theirs was client/patron system. The client/patron system is not to be confused with the model we know and understand as the employee/employer model.
- ▶ The client/patron model was not a trusted system, but it was the system in place. The people had little recourse in the face of grievances.
- ▶ The client paid the patron for protection. He was completely at the patron's mercy and in return for protection, the client agreed to submit to the patron's control and authority over him.
- ▶ The patron was very often an absent landowner who managed his affairs away from the property.
- ▶ Jesus was fond of the absentee landowner motif (theme) in his parables. Tensions abounded between the client and the patron. Jesus took advantage of those tensions to drive home a point or teach the people.
- ▶ Listeners were invited to sympathize with the servant.
- ▶ The client/patron model was often used as an image to describe God's relationship with Israel. God was the patron and Israel the client.
- ▶ One scholar suggested that this parable was a reflection of the early church's experience. As stated above, Jerusalem was in ruins and the people were beginning to listen to and accept the teaching of the false prophets.

- ▶ Mark believed that Jesus' return was about to take place. His worldview was such that everything was already in place for the culmination of God's plan of salvation and Jesus' return at the end of days.
- ▶ Mark believed that Jesus was about to take center stage and reveal himself in glory as the Son of Man, the Christ and God's own Son.
- ▶ The Jews understood the cross to be an abomination—God would never allow a Jew to be crucified in such a bloody, unclean, horrific manner. It was an embarrassment and a stumbling block for them to accept.
- ▶ At Mark's writing the Jews believed that death on a cross rendered a person unclean in the eyes of God. According to Jewish belief the cross could hardly be an instrument of salvation.
- ▶ Yet Mark was insistent that once the world saw Jesus for who he really is, the cross would no longer be the embarrassment it was. It would be understood as the ultimate instrument of salvation.
- ▶ Mark's excitement and anticipation could hardly be contained for what he believed was the immanent return of Jesus. He warned the people to ready themselves for his coming.
- ▶ Jesus' return would usher in a time of great joy and happiness. The community must be vigilant and ready at all times.
- ▶ Mark was dealing with his community's frustration. They did not understand why it was taking so long for the Lord to return. Jesus told them he would return soon.
- ▶ Even though Jesus' return was believed to be immanent, Jesus did tell them that no one knows the day or the hour. Thus, they must vigilantly and patiently wait for his return.
- ▶ The Church teaches us that the Lord's delay is a sign of God's great mercy for the human race.
- ▶ Vigilance is the word of the day! Vigilance for all generations!
- ▶ Hope in the Lord's return is all that Christians need to strengthen them as they await his coming.
- ▶ Hope in the Lord's return will strengthen them as they experience suffering, turmoil, trials and persecution in preparation to be taken up with Jesus to their Father's heavenly throne.
- ▶ Jews expected a military warrior that would restore Israel to its former glory as in the days of King David. Thus many missed the coming of the true Messiah. Their hopes were borne out of a false expectation—their own earthly passions and desires.
- ▶ Jesus tells the disciples to keep watch through the night. Nighttime was closely associated with the Lord's passion. Words used in today's parable echo words from the passion narrative. The exhortation, "not to be found asleep," echoes Jesus' final hour in Gethsemane in which he was abandoned and betrayed.
- ▶ The disciples failed to understand Jesus' paschal mission—the way of the cross.
- ▶ Mark's entire Gospel is a circular narrative. The Gospel begins where it ends with the cross squarely placed front and center. His Gospel articulates a theology of the cross.
- ▶ The evangelist warns his community to be ever watchful—to endure their

suffering and embrace the cross in their lives.

- ▶ The inauguration of the Advent season paradoxically begins with the culmination of the Jesus' story rather than its beginning.
- ▶ We are reminded that the Advent and Christmas season can only be fully understood in light of Lent and Easter. Without the incarnation of Christ, without Christ taking human flesh, there would be no sacrifice on the cross and humanity would not be reconciled to God.

*Faithful Covenant god,  
During this advent time of prayer and recollection,  
We turn our gaze toward you.  
We acknowledge our total dependence on your mercy.  
Look with kindness on your people.  
Nourish us with the food of expectant faith,  
allow our hidden hopes to discover the possibilities that lie within.  
Help us to risk, to reach beyond our normal, safe solutions to life's queries.  
O Father and Mother of the Universe,  
Your Son is coming and will not delay.  
You will bring every hidden hope to light  
and reveal yourself in our secret desires.  
Lead us deeper into the dim lit shadows of winter's dusk  
and have pity on us.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.*



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ Have you ever had an experience in which you were placed in charge of a situation? Perhaps you understood this as a test of your abilities, your faithfulness, and your trustworthiness. What did that experience evoke in you? How does your experience speak to the experience in this parable?
- ▶ Do you look more to the future or are you a present-oriented person? What are the values associated with each stance? Why is it good to be a present-oriented person? Why is it good to look to the future? What is the challenge of both postures? Does one posture dominate the other? If so, what are the implications?
- ▶ Have you ever had to wait for anything important? What did the waiting teach you? Why is waiting a good thing?

- ▶ What do you think about our belief that Jesus will come again to take us all home to be with God? How do you think that will take place? Do you think we will see that day? How should we live as a result of what we believe?
- ▶ If Advent reminds us of the cross we are to bear, in what way do you presently carry the cross in your everyday life?
- ▶ What if an angel came down and told you that Jesus' was coming back next week to gather everyone and take him or her home to be with God. The angel tells everyone to get ready. What would you do to get ready? In what way are you already ready? What are some things you would want to do, or perhaps you would like to change?
- ▶ In what way, if any, am I living as though Jesus' return was imminent? What could I do to more completely live as though Jesus' return is imminent?
- ▶ Do you fear the judgment of the last day? Imagine standing before God. Considering your life to this point, what will God affirm in you? What might he suggest you could have done better?
- ▶ What steps might you take this Advent season to become more aware and participate in the life of Christ who lives within, the Christ who is to come anew at Christmas and the Christ who is to come at the end of the world?
  
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal. (@ three minutes)

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

## Concluding Prayer

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.  
 I trust in you: strengthen my trust.  
 I love you: let me love you more and more.  
 I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.  
 I worship you as my first beginning.  
 I long for you as my last end.  
 I praise you as my constant helper.  
 And I call you as my loving protector.  
 I want to do what you ask of me:  
 In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.  
 Let me love you Lord as my God.  
 And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.  
 A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

## Appendix

**Have you ever had to wait for anything important? What did the waiting teach you? Why is waiting a good thing?**

Waiting for God is the only posture of Christian discipleship because in truth one need look no further than the human heart for the realization of that waiting. We do not wait alone.

Our family has been waiting for years for a miracle. It has been slow in coming. We are beginning to see fruits of that waiting, however. Our hope has not been in vain. This Advent season is a reminder that God walks with us, is with us and goes before us. God knows the desires of our hearts before we do. God knows that when I as mother am forced to care for and love a very sick family member I have been given empathy to love all those similarly afflicted. I see the face of Christ in those who suffer the same affliction. Waiting for God has gifted us with empathy. Waiting carries with it an invitation to carry our cross in hopeful anticipation of God's amazing action in our lives. Such is the paradox of the cross.

*An Advent Reflection:* This Advent if I do nothing more than consciously become aware of my participation in the life of Christ who dwells within—I have done much to prepare a stable for the renewal of Incarnation that also resides within each of us and gives us our divine dignity and origin. The following reflection that I found on a recent trip to Ireland had a huge impact in bringing that awareness into my life in a more focused way. It is a wonderful Advent/Christmas reflection.

In one of my stops to an ancient Celtic monastery I came across a small travel guide with a spiritual twist. I was profoundly touched by the wisdom of Incarnation expressed by two monks in this little travel guide. An Irish author of intriguing travel guides of Ireland in his book, "The Secret Places of the Burren" tells of an encounter with two men he met during his travels across Ireland. One was a brilliant nuclear physicist and the other a distinguished doctor. Both were in their early thirties, unmarried and both joined contemplative orders. They shared what motivated their decision to join the contemplative order. John Feehan describes how this encounter not only gave him an appreciation of their decision to make such an abrupt life change, but also a glimpse into the meaning of life itself. His description of what they shared touches the very core of life itself and the meaning of our Christian existence.

Feehan describes the basic philosophy from which these men gave up their lucrative lives to spend them in contemplation of God: He said: "The human being exists solely for the purpose of becoming an earthly life form of God... The inner dimension of man should rule his life, and that inner dimension was God. Everything else was a mere sideshow.

One lived a life in practical terms in as close a union as possible with God. One did not do it for a reward. One did it because this is the only rational explanation of life itself, the only explanation that gives meaning to death. The average person on the outside would be inclined to feel that if you take away money, sex, power and success from life you are left with nothing and there is little point in staying alive. The monk sees it differently. All these things are to him transient. As soon as you achieve one you want more and more and each achievement becomes emptier and shallower and brings on more and more stress and tension. The highly successful man in material terms may well be the unhappiest...

The best things in life are those which come from within: creativity, tolerance, living in the present, meditation, contemplation and above all a loving care for all life, not just human beings, but every living thing. A life lived in those terms brought unbelievable happiness", said the monks. They made an analogy, "A stained glass window looked at from the outside is merely a grayish glaze. But looked at from the inside is a thing of indescribable beauty. If you are on the inside you can experience everything to its fullest. If we accept the 'inner' life it does not really matter whether or not we are in a monastery---fulfillment of life's purpose will be ours.

Both men are now dead. One gave up worldwide fame, the other great wealth. Neither would concede that they gave up anything. They would contend that they gave up trash for everything. Indeed both were two of the happiest men I ever knew.  
(p. 106, 107)

Advent is an invitation to look at the beauty of the stained glass prisms of our soul, of my soul and the souls of all human beings, and see the face of God.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT B

Isaiah 62:16b-17, 19b-64:2-7 | 1 Corinthians 1: 3-9 | Mark 13: 33-37

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from the celebration of the liturgy:

- ▶ Advent Overview
- ▶ Liturgical Year
- ▶ Eschatology or the End Times: Heaven, Hell and Purgatory
- ▶ Catholic Social Teaching
- ▶ Kingdom of God
- ▶ Faith

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

### ADVENT OVERVIEW

- ✚ Today is the First Sunday of Advent. Advent is a season that prepares for Christmas. Advent is considered in tandem with Christmas. The season does not stand-alone. Today we will focus our attention on what we celebrate in this very important season that prepares for the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, our doctrinal session today will focus on the OVERVIEW OF ADVENT.

### LITURGICAL YEAR

- ✚ Today begins a new liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ unfolds throughout the coming year. It is most appropriate that during the season of Advent we focus our attention on what the Church celebrates in the LITURGICAL YEAR.

### ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

- ✚ Isaiah heralds the *One Who is to Come* who will usher in the *Last Days*. Today's parable belongs to the genre of departure/return parables and thus deals with end times, last days and eschatology. The Scriptures of Advent are alive with cosmic images of last days and end times. Advent is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about last things. Thus, today our doctrinal session will address ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

## JESUS CHRIST

- ✦ Mark insists that the Lord's return is immanent. He exhorts believers to be ready for his return. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what we believe about Jesus Christ—what we profess in regard to his life, death and resurrection. What a better way to begin the new liturgical year.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

- ✦ Isaiah looks to the Day of the Lord in which peace and justice will be established. Advent is a time we consider our responsibility to promote peace and justice in the world. Catholic social teaching addresses our Christian responsibility to promote peace and justice. It is thus an appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

- ✦ Advent proclaims the coming of the Messiah who will establish God's kingdom of peace and justice. It is thus an appropriate opportunity to focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about the establishment of the KINGDOM OF GOD.

## FAITH

- ✦ The prophets of Advent sound the clarion call for conversion and deep abiding faith. It is time to take stock, to pay attention to God's invitation to grow in or relationship with him. It is thus an appropriate time for us to reflect on what the Church teaches about faith itself. Today's doctrinal session will focus on FAITH.