

# exploring

## THE SUNDAY READINGS

YOUR GUIDE FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2021

WRITTEN BY **Alice Camille** (CONTENT HAS BEEN ADAPTED FROM PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED MATERIAL)



### OPENING PRAYER

We face choices every day: in our relationships, with the use of our money, resources, skills, and time. Giver of all that we have and are, give us wisdom and good counsel to choose according to your will. Bless our resources and help us to use them for good purposes. Heal our relationships and make them whole and holy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## November 7 | LECTONARY 155 THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### BE NICE TO WIDOWS WEEK

#### FIRST READING

1 KINGS 17:10-16

**The widow was able to eat for a year, and Elijah and her son as well.**

Some of the Bible's favorite citizens are widows. I suppose Scripture would have a kind word for widowers, too, except such men could marry again easily and generally did. The older a widow was, the less likely that option was. If she had a son by her first husband, that option went nearly to zero. No man wanted an heir who's not his own son. A woman without father, husband, or adult son was a vulnerable person indeed.

Which is why the sacred writers focus on the plight of widows, urging the community of Israel to prove its allegiance to God with a special compassion for those who had no place and no voice. No wonder Israel's prophets showed them particular attention. The Church has a special consideration for widows. Losing a spouse remains one of the most painful life transitions to make, and it can still impoverish a family. How do we as a community respond to the vulnerable ones in our midst?

» **Who are today's "widow class" of unprotected ones? How can the Church assist them?**

#### SECOND READING

HEBREWS 9:24-28

**Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, but heaven itself.**

What's going on in the Letter to the Hebrews? It's among the most peculiar of the New Testament writings—only bested by the Letter of Jude, which is never read on Sundays or we could have a fine conversation about it! Hebrews is odd for many reasons. We don't know who wrote it, or when, or why. But we do know to whom: not to Christian believers, like every other document in the New Testament, but to "the Hebrews"—those who hadn't heard or accepted the gospel of Jesus.

Hebrews draws an extended analogy between the priesthood of Israel and the role of Jesus in heaven. Someone familiar with temple priesthood—possibly a Levite priest who joined the Church—wanted to persuade devout Jews that

the sacrifice of the cross surpassed all temple sacrifices and eliminated the need for them. It's a smooth example of apologetics: arguing the case for belief using the listener's own position as a springboard. Hebrews might seem passé when aimed at today's Church. But you'll find at least one sentence to put on the bathroom mirror for further reflection.

» **My favorite verse from Hebrews is 4:12. What's yours?**

#### GOSPEL

MARK 12:38-44

**"They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers."**

Beware the widow killers! Anyone who cheats or beggars the most vulnerable members of society is in for a bad time—"a very severe condemnation," as Jesus himself terms it. I want to shake this verse in front of every plumber who provides shoddy work for my 90-year-old mom or for every car mechanic who talks her into buying services she doesn't need.

Widows may seem like easy targets. But they have a Divine Insurance Plan. What do you think they're purchasing with all of those recited rosaries?

Those who chew up the resources of the vulnerable, poor, sick, or feeble are not going to get away with it. Those who take advantage of the stranger, the person

without the right paperwork, the one who doesn't speak English very well or who can't read, is on notice. The meek ones may be invisible in our community, but they're very visible to God. And God can hear their cry quite plainly. The lengthy prayers of the callous ones who mow down the weak, however, seem to develop

a lot of static between here and heaven.

- » How does your parish defend the unprotected ones? **How do you contribute to their defense?**

## November 14 | LECTONARY 158 THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

# FALLING APART—AND COMING BACK TOGETHER

### FIRST READING

DANIEL 12:1-3

**It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began.**

Dickens was right. This is the worst of times. We can all list dozens of things that are terribly wrong with the world right now, some of which might lead to consequences that are nightmarish. Episodes of violence, natural disasters, worldwide mistrust, and a lack of concern for the common good only begin to describe the pain.

This is also the best of times, though we can forget that part sometimes. We have ways to communicate that keep the world close. We have the possibility to do great good in this world with enough cooperation and generosity.

Human history could hurtle toward utter chaos, or soar to new heights of justice and peace. Each of us gets a voice in the course we take. We vote with our attitudes and opinions, our economic decisions, our charity, our example, and our prayers. What kind of world do you want to live in? What are you willing to pay for that vision?

- » What do you do to **bring about a world of justice and peace?**

### SECOND READING

HEBREWS 10:11-14, 18

**For by one offering Jesus has made perfect those who are being consecrated.**

Human history has been a botched business almost from the first human decision, as our creation story seeks to express. We're an imperfect race, and our love is not pure. Speaking for myself, I feel the tug of selfishness every hour, directing me to choose what's good for me even if the rest of humanity—or the rest of my family!—won't benefit from the choice.

Yet Jesus made a choice, what we call a perfect choice, in consecrating humanity with his blood. History has been dark and bleak, but every hour holds the possibility of a better way. You and I can participate in the consecration of time itself. We do it with our prayers, our selfless acts, our forgiveness, our compassion, our pause for wisdom's direction. Where do you want your life to go? Let the next step take you farther down that path. Yesterday may be a land of missed opportunities, but today can be anything you want to make it.

- » What can you do in the next sixty minutes **that would sanctify the gift of such time given to you?**

### GOSPEL

MARK 13:24-32

**"When you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates."**

Like most people, I've had days when the end of the world can't come soon enough. I get tired of trying, fighting, and losing the same battles. I feel ready to say: come, Lord Jesus, take what's yours, and take me with you!

We might call those experiences the Elijah-under-the-broom-tree hours. There's no shame in weariness, but there's also no need for despair. Jesus will come when the hour is right and not a moment sooner. Till then, there's work to do, and we're responsible for doing it. As Jesus says, heaven and earth are disposable, but the word of life is not going anywhere. Speculation about the end-times is a fun parlor game, but it won't get us closer to the answer. What's important is not to lose heart. What's vital is to stay the course with love and fidelity.

The Church year comes to a close next week. The year-end readings remind us that, even when things fall apart, the restoration of all things is just around the corner.

- » What do you do to **rekindle courage and hope, when things fall apart?**

## ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION

### FIRST READING

DANIEL 7:13-14

**His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away.**

"Why are you here?" I asked the kids in my religious ed class. A dozen pairs of puzzled eyes looked back at me. What did I mean? Why are they in religion class? Why are they in the Catholic

### SECOND READING

REVELATION 1:5-8

**"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God.**

If we take this religion thing seriously, everything begins and ends with one primary relationship. We shape our concern for creation around the idea that it originates with God and is divine property, not ours. We encounter others

### GOSPEL

JOHN 18:33B-37

**So Pilate said to Jesus, "Then you are a king?"**

Pilate puts a remarkable series of questions to Jesus, and to his accusers, in this passage narrating the trial that led to his execution. Starting with verse 18, Pilate asks what the charges against Jesus are. He asks if Jesus is the King of the

Jews. He snippily inquires if he, Pilate, looks like a Jew to Jesus. He bluntly asks what Jesus has done. He inquires again if Jesus is some kind of king. Pilate even asks, perhaps rhetorically, "What is truth?" But he

doesn't linger long enough for the reply.

Pilate asks the crowds if they would prefer the release of Barabbas. He wonders, a little fearfully, where Jesus might be from. He wonders angrily why Jesus refuses to speak to him. He asks if Jesus is unaware of how powerful a man Pilate is. Finally, Pilate asks the crowds if they expect him to crucify Jesus. It's the last question he asks that day. The one question he never asks is: "What is the right thing to do with this man I find to be innocent?" It's the one question that might have saved his soul.

- » Sometimes we arrive at the wrong answer because we don't ask the right question. **What questions do you ask during an examination of conscience?**

**DOMINION MEANS SUPREME AUTHORITY, ULTIMATE OWNERSHIP. ADD THE QUALITY OF "EVERLASTING" TO THAT, AND WE'RE TALKING UNSURPASSABLE SOVEREIGNTY. ACCORDING TO OUR FAITH, JESUS HAS IT.**

Church? Why are they on planet earth, ultimately?

The truth is, those questions are all related. If not, then we're wasting our time on religious ed. The first question to ask is actually the last one: why do you and I exist? The antique answer is still the best one: to know, love, and serve God. Once we're sure of our purpose, the rest of the questions answer themselves.

Dominion means supreme authority, ultimate ownership. Add the quality of "everlasting" to that, and we're talking unsurpassable sovereignty. According to our faith, Jesus has it. No other power on earth holds our allegiance, or deserves our loyalty. At the end of each Church year, we remind ourselves that Jesus is King of the Universe, and Lord of our hearts. Following him is our true purpose.

- » How can we know God? **How can we love and serve God?**

with the spirit that Jesus shows for us: love, compassion, forgiveness, healing, and hopefulness. We take up each task with the object of doing good—not only for ourselves or those we love, but for the common good, inclusive of all God's children, not to mention other beloved creatures.

Alpha and Omega encompasses the whole Greek alphabet. It's an expression that brackets totality and puts it all back into God's hands. It's where time originated and where eternity is going. There's no place outside of God, nowhere to go and no place to hide. To exist is to be held within the mind of God. It's rather comforting to know we can never be lost or overlooked. It's also deeply challenging to realize that none of us are getting away with anything, try as we may.

- » What are the consequences of having a God **who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always present?**

# November 28

LECTIONARY 3  
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## THIS PROMISE IS FOR REAL

### FIRST READING

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

**The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made.**

Promises are easy to make, tougher to keep. Consider the friendships lost to broken confidences and repeated no-shows. Close to half of all marriages fail. Adult children are estranged from parents who pledged, time and again, to be there and were not. Public leaders spout campaign rhetoric that dissolves into thin air after Election Day. We mortals are not very good at follow-through.

Thankfully, God is a promise-maker who takes commitment seriously. God demonstrates throughout our sacred stories that being “all in” with the human race involves the package deal of a benevolent creation, heroic rescues, regular restorations, plus healing, teaching, guidance, and the occasional much-needed course corrections. Grand slam Incarnate Savior included. That’s a promise!

- » What kind of central promises govern your life: with God, people, institutions? **What helps you to stay true to your promises?**

### SECOND READING

1 THESSALONIANS 3:12—4:2

**May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.**

Advent is the season many of us can’t wait to begin. Our Jewish friends begin their observance of Chanukah on the same day this year, so we reach this time of hope together. Some of us are so eager to start celebrating that we’ve had up the lights, garland, tree, and lawn Santas for days or weeks already. I think I received my first Christmas card in October. There really is such a thing as over-anticipation.

Yet it’s hard to fault anyone for feeling a certain desperation to begin a season dedicated to the spirit of love and the reconciliation of differences. God becomes human, for heaven’s sake: if that gulf can be crossed, anything can! It can’t be more heroic to forgive those who trespass against us, to welcome the outsider, and to be more generous than usual even with strangers. Let the increase of love and understanding around this Advent.

- » **Who is waiting for your forgiveness this season?** Whose forgiveness do you seek?

### GOSPEL

LUKE 21:25-28, 34-36

**“Nations will be in dismay...”**

On cozy nights before our winter fireplaces (real or fake), we find words of apocalypse perplexing and inappropriate. Why spoil our hot chocolate (powdered instant or creamily homemade) with all that noise about destruction and cataclysm? Don’t we give enough of our year over to dire headlines (genuine crisis or silly hype)? Do we have to be vigilant in prayer (or just pretend to be so, as usual) even in our happiest season? Can’t we just watch our Nativity pageants (or Rudolph, or the Grinch) in peace?

Apocalyptic sayings of Jesus can sound like Debbie Downer showing up at the world’s holiday party. The thing about Debbie is, she’s telling the truth, even if we don’t care to hear it just now. Everything phony and false will be stripped away in God’s coming reign. If we hold fast to what’s authentic, we can relax and enjoy this hour’s bliss.

- » God promises a final reckoning. **How prepared are we to stand up for our choices?**



### LET US PRAY...

We thank you, Lord, for the possibilities you present to us in every hour. Open our hearts to choose love in all things: in our eyes, in our words, and in our actions. Banish hardness, common cruelties, the spirit of division, and conflict from our homes. Make us children of light, attracting all we meet to your beauty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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