

1st Sunday of Advent (A)
(Isaiah 2:1-5 / Matthew 24:37-44)
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Although our times are less familiar with Old Testament stories, some of them, such as the story of the Flood and Noah's Ark, continue to haunt the collective imagination. That being said, even if the allusion of the Gospel to this episode in the Book of Genesis is not altogether foreign to us, it is nonetheless enigmatic. Jesus compares "the coming of the Son of Man" to what happened in the time of Noah, before the great cataclysm that swept humanity into the waters of the flood, leaving only a few survivors.

We cannot understand what Jesus wants us to say to us unless we become familiar with the deeper meaning of these stories. The story of the Flood is presented as the antithesis of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, which evoke the Creation of the world and of humanity. The Flood presents itself first as an anti-Creation, a de-Creation. In a world that came into being, by emerging from the waters of nothingness, the story of the Flood speaks of the world's renewed engulfment in the waters of the nothingness because it has been eaten away by evil and the sin of humankind. Because its heart was consumed by evil, violence and hatred, humankind rushed recklessly into non-being, overwhelmed through its own fault.

But the story does not stop there. To this de-Creation succeeds a new Creation, of which Noah is the prototype, for he is a "just and honest man, who walks with God," as the Book of Genesis tells us. Thus, the de-creation caused by evil, is opposed by a work of re-creation of what is good, in the heart of the just. If Noah did not sink into nothingness, this is because he chose to "walk with God", to follow his paths by making a covenant with Him as he entered the Ark. Clearly, evil is only an absence, a void, a lack of being. Evil is what is not, void that engulfs all who follow it in its own nothingness.

For Jesus, "the coming of the Son of Man" is therefore similar to this new Creation. However, he warns his followers against a vision that is too simplistic of what is to come, by explaining certain points in Noah's story. He begins by reminding us of the blindness of Noah's contemporaries. They did not see things coming, "they did not suspect anything". They slipped, little by little, insidiously, on the slope of evil. Evil ended up completely engulfing them, without them realizing it, blinded, as they were, by their own malice.

On the other hand, Jesus specifies that life does not depend on the activity we perform or where we are. It is not enough to put on the monastic habit, to talk about spiritual things or to believe oneself just in order to avoid the gulf that leads to nothingness. St. Paul recalls this with vehemence, in a passage found in the Epistle to the Romans – a text which is read on this Sunday. The apostle speaks of rejecting "the activities of darkness", "feasting, drinking, orgies, debauchery, disputes and jealousies", in order "to put on the new man", the Lord Jesus Christ. This new creation, as the first reading of the book of Isaiah already noted, is a creation of unity and peace, not division and war.

As for the time and the moment, Jesus does not want to say anything about this, because it is already here and now, in our daily existence, that it takes place. This is why the Church invites us, by proposing that we meditate on these texts of Scripture, to have a lucidity and an honesty that will allow us to discern the true inclination of our own life. The time of Advent is a time for us to listen to the call to conversion, a time when God reaches out to us inviting us to abandon the paths of evil and lies. Advent is a time for us to change our lives: a time to choose life instead of nothingness.