Spirituality
Scripture for Life



An Advent wreath is seen in a church sanctuary, Nov. 30, 2025, the first Sunday of Advent last year. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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Spring turns to summer; summer turns to autumn; autumn turns to winter. Seasons change; and in some parts of the country and world, time changes from daylight saving time to standard time. Life is dynamic; nothing stays the same.

This Sunday begins a new liturgical season. Advent is a time of quiet reflection of hope and promise as we prepare to commemorate and celebrate the joyous event of Christ's birth. But the heart of the world is not yet ready to commemorate or celebrate this Christian feast, and today's first reading from Isaiah reminds us that there is much work to be done and changes to be made.

Advent offers us the time to "take stock," to sit with our God, perhaps in the early morning hours before the rest of life awakens, or late in the evening before we nod off to slumber. Advent is a time that invites us into intimate conversations with our God about the state of our world and the state of our lives, to ponder what brings us joy, what challenges us, what needs systemic change, and how we can participate in the softening and healing of the world's heart.

First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2026

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7
Psalm 80
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37

Today's reading from Isaiah is deeply personal, direct and honest. We hear the voice of one who not only recounts what is going on in the world but also questions God as to why this Holy One let things get as bad as they are. Only someone who has an intimate and trusting relationship with the Divine and a deep awareness of the state of human affairs can be so straightforward and direct. Sensing the people's distance from God and God's seeming distance from the people, the poetic voice of the Isaian text issues a demanding call to the Divine: Return to us.

The problem at hand is that the people have lost their way; they have fallen out of a right relationship with God, whose Spirit has always been their North Star. Consequently, they have become "unclean," withered like leaves, and their good deeds now resemble polluted rags. The images are graphic; the question posed to the Holy One is candid: Why do you let us wander from your ways with hardened hearts? The scenario described in this reading is not unfamiliar.

As we take stock of our world today, we will discover that our assessment is eerily similar to that which we hear in today's reading from Isaiah. We are good and generous people, gifted and blessed with potential, but some among us have lost their way. This reality is evident in the global wars that the U.S. either participates in or supplies funding and munitions to, actions that are contrary to the Gospel yet often affirmed by biblical prophetic texts if we read with the grain of texts and accept the hegemonic, militaristic, cultural voice that shaped them.

Many of us have experienced different forms of violence that tear at the fabric of life: the presence of ICE, human trafficking, domestic abuse and neglect, and even the power that technofeudal lords wield over us mentally and emotionally, especially over our children, through the creation of addictive social media programs and platforms designed to dull intelligence, distort human relationships and break down the real connectivity between us. Thus, we become like withered leaves and we too wonder: How did we get so far afield and distant from the Holy One whose inspiration and wisdom still waits to inform our ways?

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Even in the midst of such sordidness, this reading from Isaiah reminds us that hope exists. Like the one who poignantly addresses God, we need to harness hope, muster up the courage to be candid with our God about the things that matter, and then work tirelessly to address the issues, leaders and people that have made our whole world "unclean" and turned our good deeds into "polluted rags." Perhaps, we might need to take stock of our own attitudes and deeds in need of transformation.

One thing is certain, however; all creation is the work of the divine potter, and all that exists is capable of being reshaped. Advent, then, is both a time of waiting and making space in our lives for the Holy One who wants to be our North Star and to work with us to reshape our world and mend its brokenness.

Lastly, the irony is this: Mark's Gospel issues a summons: Be watchful; be alert because we do not know when our God will come. But the truth is, we are already bearers of the Divine embodied in our lives. We have work to do; and so this Advent, we need to ask ourselves: What are we waiting for?