Lectio Divina – First Sunday of Advent Year A

Contexts

Matthew’s Gospel (in brief)

* Composed between 80-90 CE
* Author is anonymous, but named as ‘Matthew the tax collector’ by later tradition.
* Written in scholarly ‘synagogue’ Greek.
* Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
* Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: “When Jesus had finished….”:
  + Prologue – chapters 1-4 Genealogy, Nativity & infancy
  + 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
  + 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
  + 3rd: 13 Parable Discourse
  + 4th: 18 Community Discourse
  + 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
* May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
* Jesus first words are ‘to fulfil all righteousness’.
* A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
* 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
* The only Gospel to explicitly mention the ‘Church’ – Matthew is theologian of the church.
* Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
* Names Jesus as ‘Messiah’ at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 24:37-44 – things to notice

* This Sunday’s Gospel is an excerpt from the longer discourse which precedes the passion of Jesus.
* Context is the imminent confrontation with the powers of darkness.
* Note apocalyptic nature of words.
* The people in Noah’s day drew the wrong conclusions about Noah and got ‘swept away’.
* Notice the ‘twinning’ of the 2 men and 2 women.
* ‘Stay awake’ is eschatological alertness to the will of God.
* The parable about the householder underlines the point of Jesus’ words about staying awake and being watchful – *you must stand ready* for the coming of the Son of Man.
* Note: The interpretation of Jesus’ words is not easy – is Jesus talking about the destruction of Jerusalem or the Temple? Is he talking about the end of the world? Is he speaking literally or metaphorically? What is the meaning of ‘when the Son of Man comes’? Is it at the end of time or is it something more personal?
* In terms of Matthew’s community, perhaps it is also a warning against complacency.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

This week’s readings call us to “Stay awake”, to be vigilant and attentive to the signs of the times so that we do not miss the moment when God breaks into human history once again. The God who came among us is still among us. In Advent we train our eyes to see the reign of God more clearly so that we may be totally caught up in God’s action in the world.

Isaiah’s vision in the first reading captures the sense of God’s presence among his people through the images of the high mountain and the Temple – the dwelling place of God among his people. The people’s response in the reading is to be drawn into God’s presence ‘that he may teach us his ways’ & ‘we may walk in his paths’, and utterly transformed into a new way of living (swords into ploughshares, etc).

We live in the ‘in between’ time – between the first and final comings of Jesus. This excerpt from the Gospel (and also the Second Reading from Paul to the Romans) urges us to stay awake, alert, watchful and ready not only for the ‘day of the Lord’s coming’ at the end of time, but also to the presence of God in our lives and our world. It is a call to ‘lift up our heads, open our eyes, and see the work of God around us’ (Break Open the Word).

Joyful watchfulness is emphasised by the first reading and by the psalm response: let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. In Advent we train our eyes to see the reign of God more clearly so that we may be totally caught up in God’s action in the world as we wait for the final manifestation of God’s glory.