

Not Meant to Frighten

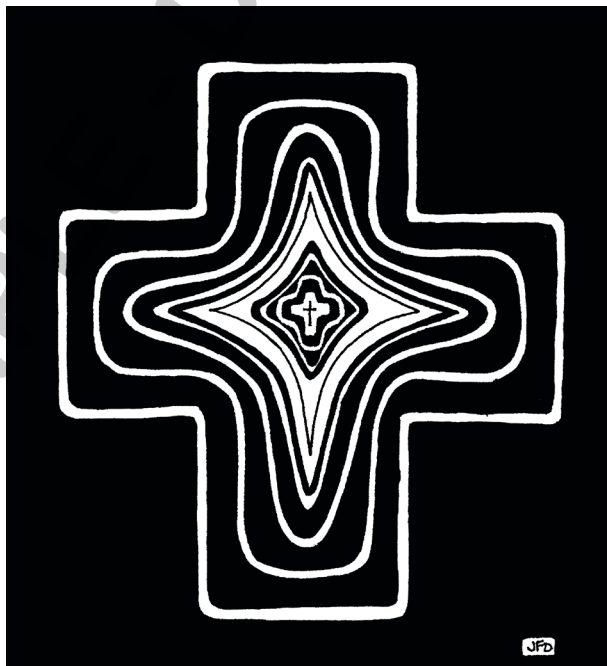
This Week's Readings at Mass

- Isaiah 2:1-5 • Zion, the messianic capital
- Romans 13:11-14 • Christian use of time
- Matthew 24:37-44 • The need for watchfulness

This reading can be unsettling. A reminder of how so many died in the catastrophe of the flood in Noah's time, the image of some people being snatched away from their work while others are "left behind," the description of a thief coming in the night—all are disturbing images. The final words of the passage "Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour" can feel frightening in this regard.

In Jesus' time, when his Jewish people were oppressed under Roman rule, they envisioned God's arrival in terms as we have just heard. Rather than being frightened at the prospect, they looked forward in hope to God's arrival in the world to pronounce final judgment. When Jesus used the term "the coming" of the Son of Man, he used the Greek word "parousia." At that time, it referred to the arrival of a ruler, god, or deity who would visit a particular city or his people and bring salvation to them. Jesus was reminding them to hang onto that hope as they waited for what must have seemed like forever.

Today our attention is more likely caught up on the daily matters at hand rather than longing for God to put an end to a miserable world. If that is the case, Jesus challenges us to stay awake, be more alert, and be *present* to what we are doing because we don't know when things might change in an instant. If we knew we or a loved one only had a year to live, or a month, or



"It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

Sheepish Question:

What holiday preparations are taking my attention away from the coming of the Lord?

a day, what would we want to be doing up until the end? Posting on social media? Working overtime? Eating or drinking until we feel sick? Probably not.

This passage is an invitation to reevaluate how we spend our time—and to not take tomorrow for granted. How would Jesus want us to spend our time if we were to die tomorrow? Let's awaken to that—and start today.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Thinking about people and peoples today and throughout history who have been oppressed and mistreated, can you see how they might find hope in such a passage?
- 2 What do you want to be more vigilant about this upcoming week? How do you think Jesus is inviting you to spend your valuable time and energy?

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John Was On Fire!

This Week's Readings at Mass

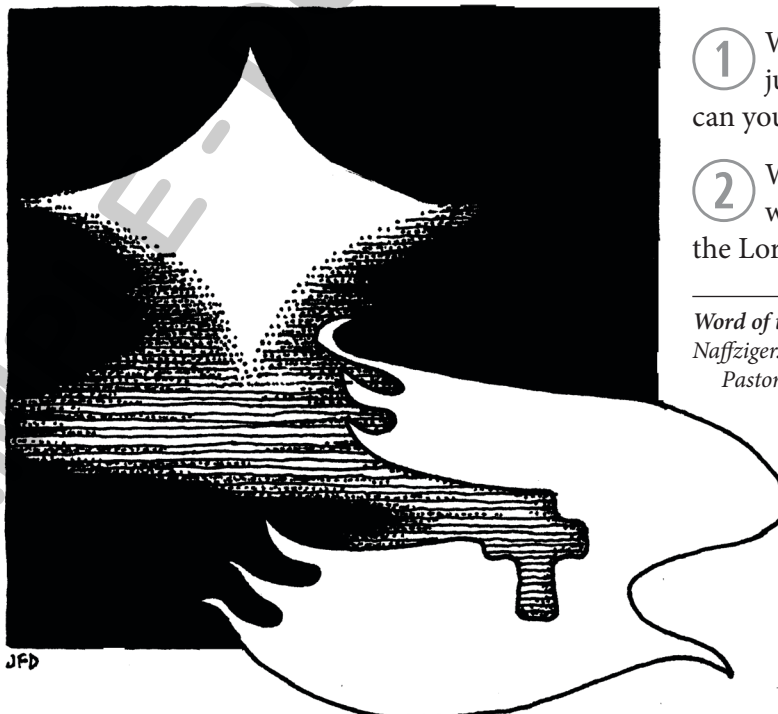
- Isaiah 11:1-10 • The rule of Emmanuel
- Romans 15:4-9 • Prayer of encouragement
- Matthew 3:1-12 • John the Baptist

After hearing the beautiful images of the lion and the lamb, the cow and the bear, and the child and the snake living together in peace in the first reading today, the Gospel passage about John the Baptist may seem jarring, or even off-putting. Then again, the words and actions of John the Baptist, whenever he shows up in the Gospels, are always strong, direct, and challenging. Sometimes people don't want to hear his directness—or his challenges.

John was *on fire* with the urgency that we turn our lives around. He was asking folks to repent of whatever in their lives was keeping them from living in God's way of justice and peace. He gladly baptized those who acknowledged their sins, but he had little patience for false repentance, especially coming from religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees. It didn't matter to him who someone was, what family they came from, or what their religious background was—he wanted to see the fruits of their repentance.

John was a New Testament version of the Old Testament prophets: fiery, passionate characters who unsettled the rich and powerful but offered hope and consolation to those willing to be honest about their shortcomings.

As we prepare ourselves for Christmas, John is a valuable guide. His ur-



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“He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted.”

Sheepish Question:

How can I enhance my feelings of compassion with a deeper sense of justice?

gency to evaluate how we live in this world and how we need to change is hard to ignore. We have work to do before Christmas that doesn't involve planning the perfect party or finding the perfect gift. Our work now is to acknowledge what we need to change, ask forgiveness, and get back to doing God's work.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Who in your life is on fire for justice and repentance? What can you learn from them?
- 2 What can you do this coming week to “prepare the way of the Lord”?

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