

**Reflection on the Gospel-1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent Year C**  
**(Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel passage, with its vivid description of the end-time signs, may seem a strange choice of reading for Advent and the beginning of the Church year. It is only strange if we take the descriptions literally and focus on the old rather than the new that is forever breaking into the world. The image of Jesus coming on the clouds belongs within an ancient understanding of the structure of the world in which God and God's heavenly court is located in the heavens above. It might function in our times as a reminder that the Incarnation, "of God's becoming material" (Karl Rahner), is an ongoing cosmic event.

The Advent and Christmas periods are about the coming "in power and great glory" of the One who brings the liberation of our God. The earliest Christians believed that Jesus would return in their own times and bring everything to completion. Some decades after the death of Jesus, the members of Luke's community had come to realize that this second coming of Christ was not just around the corner as they had expected. They then needed to be reminded that a delayed return was no excuse for lack of vigilance. Luke warns against activities and attitudes that de-sensitize the heart or the human spirit: carousing, drunkenness and undue worry.

Suffering is part of life and God's advent or coming in the lives of the suffering takes myriad forms. From Luke's perspective, the sufferings of the present may well be the prelude to a new experience of the presence of God in the world. An attentive heart and constant prayer for the strength to withstand whatever comes-this is the proper stance for the Christian believer.

This gospel passage is best read against the backdrop of today's first reading from Jeremiah that looks to the fulfillment of God's promise of the "virtuous branch for David". The organic metaphor of the branch reminds us of the interconnectedness of God's people and of all being across the ages. The virtue of the expected descendant of David finds expression in honesty and integrity, literally "justice and righteousness/right relationship".

Justice in the Hebrew tradition is about redress in the law courts for the most vulnerable. Righteousness is about right relationships as well as the equitable sharing and proper use of Earth's resources. Justice and righteousness are two sides of the one coin. Where they are absent, there is no liberation.

Our prayer and practical action this Advent might embrace the concerns of those who yearn for liberation from various forms of oppression, including those seeking asylum among us and those who have sought asylum yet still await resettlement. Our Advent could make a difference to their Christmas.