

Put on the Armor of Light **(1st Sunday of Advent, Year A)**

Romans 13:11-14—Salvation is Nearer to Us Now than when we First Believed

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you *to wake from sleep*. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; *the night is far gone, the day is at hand*. Let us then *cast off the works of darkness* and *put on the armor of light*; *let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day*, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But *put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh*, to gratify its desires. (Romans 13:11-14)

1. Sunrise: “What hour it is” (13:11)
 - a. Sleep vs. Rising: “full time to wake from sleep” (13:11)
 - b. Night: “far gone”; Day “is at hand” (13:12)
2. Works of Darkness: “cast off” (like night-clothes)
 - a. “Reveling” or “orgies” (Greek *kômos*; cf. feasts of Dionysus; Gal 5:21)
 - b. “Drunkenness” (Greek *methē*) (Gal 5:21)
 - c. “Debauchery” or “promiscuity” (Greek *koitê*, “bedding”) (Heb 13:4)
 - d. “Licentiousness” or “lust” (Greek *aselgeia*, “sexual excesses”) (Eph 4:19)
 - e. “Quarreling” or “rivalry” (1 Cor 1:11)
 - f. “Jealousy” (Greek *zēlos*): quarreling/divisions (1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:20)
3. Armor of Light: “put on” (like day clothes; get up and get dressed for battle!)
 - a. Armor = “the Lord Jesus Christ” (13:14; cf. Eph 6:11, “armor of God”)
 - b. Christ as Clothing: “put on the new man” (Col 3:9; Eph 4:24)
4. Penance: “make no provision for the flesh” (13:14)
 - a. “Flesh” (Greek *sarx*) ≠ the Body (Greek *sōma*)
 - b. “Flesh” = fallen human nature, with disordered “desires” (Greek *epithymia*)

The Living Tradition

Thomas Aquinas: “[I]nasmuch as the Church reads these words during Advent, they seem to refer to the salvation which Christ worked during his first coming. Accordingly, we can understand the Apostle speaking in place of all believers since the beginning of the world. For as the time of Christ’s incarnation drew near, and the predictions of the prophets grew in number, it could be said: “our salvation,” namely Christ, “is nearer than when we believed,” i.e., when men in the very beginning started to believe in the future coming of Christ... They can also be taken to refer to the time of mercy, when one begins willing to depart from past sins. For at that time he is closer to his salvation than previously, when he had a dead faith... (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, no. 1065; trans. F. R. Larcher; cf. no 1075; CCC 1852; on drunkenness as “mortal sin”; trans. F. R. Larcher).

Francis de Sales: Since prayer places our intellect in the brilliance of God’s light and

exposes our will to the warmth of his heavenly love, nothing else so effectively purifies our intellect of ignorance and our will of depraved affection... I especially counsel you to practice mental prayer, the prayer of the heart, and particularly that which centers on the life and passion of our Lord. By often turning your eyes to him in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with him. You will learn his ways and form your actions after the pattern of him. He is “the light of the world”... Set aside an hour every day before dinner, if possible early in the morning, when your mind is less distracted and fresher after the night’s rest. (Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 2.1; trans. J. K. Ryan)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (1st Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. The apostle Paul lists several very specific “works of darkness” that followers of Jesus should avoid if they are to be ready for the final judgment. How can we apply St. Paul’s teaching to our lives today?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1998).
3. Frank J. Matera, *Romans* (Paideia; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).