

First Sunday of Advent
Cycle B RCL
Revised

Isaiah 64:1-9a

Although we usually ascribe the contents of Isaiah 56-66 to the period after Judah's return from exile in Babylon, Isaiah 63:7-64:12 is a lament that echoes themes of exilic psalms like Psalm 74 and Psalm 80. (See below.) The principal crisis of the Babylonian Exile for Jews was that they did not understand how the great God they had worshiped could have deserted them or left them to the devices of their enemies. Lamentations such as the one contained in our passage appear to lie within that period of anxious questioning during the Babylonian Exile.

Psalms 80:1-7, 16-18

In Babylon there was no Temple for the Jews where they might pour out their lamentations to the Lord. Nevertheless, Jewish writers, probably priests, imitated the style of the Temple's old *community laments* to decry their Exile and to attempt to rouse the God, who once ruled in Zion, to come to their aid once more.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

The city of Corinth was a sailors' city and famous in ancient lore for its moral profligacy, a reputation the Roman-age city might not have fully deserved. Nevertheless, the church in Corinth operated in the shadow of the still popular Aphrodite temple on Mt. Corinth with its cultic prostitutes. Further, because of the mixing of peoples of many nationalities and mores in this crossroads city, most of the major philosophical and religious schools of Paul's time flourished in Corinth, as did a superabundance of wealth generated by the city's maritime activities. Understandably, Paul faced numerous difficulties in guiding the new church on its way ethically, spiritually, and intellectually. Today's reading introduces a letter from Paul that will soundly rebuke the Corinthian Christians for their continued moral decadence and their foolish spiritual arrogance. Nevertheless, he begins this difficult letter with a statement of faith in his readers and in God's ability to bring them safely to the end of their course.

Mark 13:24-37

Many first-century Jews believed that the coming of God's kingdom would be preceded by natural disasters, and early Christians seem to have shared that view. Jesus here teaches his students that they should not be alarmed at such events and should greet them as harbingers of the kingdom. Mark 13 as a whole is often referred to as "Mark's Apocalypse" because of its teaching about the end of the age and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.