

Consider This Your Wake-up Call

[Text Mark 13:26-37]

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Last week, I noticed a certain individual nodding-off during my sermon. Now I understand how this can happen. When we come in from the cold and sit in a warm, comfortable pew, we can feel a bit drowsy. And the older we get, the easier it is to drift-off. This week, I asked a friend who's been sitting with this person, to please try to keep him [or her] awake. Without missing a beat, my friend said, "But Dave, I thought that was *your* job!" [touche!]

In today's New Testament reading, Jesus says to his friends, "Be on guard and *stay awake*; for you do not know when the time will come. It's like a person going on a journey, who when leaving, puts the servants in charge, each of them with his or her own tasks, and commands the doorkeeper to be on watch. Therefore, keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come - in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at sunrise - lest he find you asleep when he suddenly arrives. Therefore, what I say to you, I say to all: Keep awake!"

The message for this first Sunday of Advent is clear and simple: Stay awake, and be ready! So I'll do my best to help us stay awake, by keeping *my* message clear and simple. Simply put, Advent is a season of *preparation*. It's a time when you and I prepare our hearts and our lives for the coming of Christmas - the celebration of Christ's birth. And it's also a time to prepare for that promised Day, when Divine Love and Peace will perfectly prevail throughout this entire planet. And if the prospect of *that* doesn't inspire and rouse you, then maybe we better check for a pulse!

Throughout his ministry, Jesus proclaims that the Divine Realm of love and peace is coming, and in fact, is already present in this world. That's certainly a bold proclamation, particularly considering the troubled condition of the world in which Jesus lived. His homeland was

occupied by the Romans, his religion was being debased by corrupt leaders, poverty and oppression were widespread. Yet in spite of the prevailing problems, what makes this proclamation absolutely *authentic*, is the way in which Jesus himself perfectly embodies that love and peace. In the person of Jesus Christ, the Sacred Word - the Divine Purpose - is expressed in human form, living among us "full of grace and truth." Jesus comes to bring *Good News* to the poor, release to the captive, and wholeness to those whose lives are broken and hurting. Advent is a time to remember and celebrate that Good News, and to do what we can to make that Good News a reality in our own broken and troubled world today.

This morning's readings raise-up two specific things that you and I can do to help make this happen. The first, is to *watch*. And I'm not talking about that lazy, laid-back kind of watching that happens after the tryptophane from the turkey kicks-in, and you really don't care whether the Bears or the Lions win, but you sit and watch the game anyway. No, I mean the kind of excited, energized, just-can't-get-to-sleep watching of a little kid on Christmas Eve, who know that something *spectacular* is about to happen! The kind of watching that eagerly looks for the signs and symbols, the clues and the "coincidences" all around us, which tell us that there is much more mystery and magic to Life than meets the eye. Advent beckons you and me to wake-up and watch, not only with our eyes, but also with our hearts and imaginations - to keep our entire selves wide-open to the pervasive Divine Presence that touches our lives, and our world, each and every day!

The second thing that the Advent Season calls us to do, is to *wait*. Of course there are two radically different ways in which you and I can wait. We can sit and wait and do nothing - twiddling our thumbs, or tediously typing, texting, and twittering-away 'til we're in a trance - oblivious to what's actually going on around us. *Or*...you and I can wait like those who anxiously anticipate the arrival of an amazingly special person, or a phenomenal once-in-a-lifetime event - excitedly counting-down the days, the hours, the minutes; making sure that we are 100% ready when the Time comes. Likewise, you and I can actively prepare

ourselves and our surroundings, for that Promised Moment when Divine compassion and peace will finally reign supreme. And through our preparations, you and I can hasten the arrival of that glorious Day - by doing those things that incorporate and promote Divine goodness and compassion.

We can stand-up for the poor and hungry and helpless, using our gifts and resources to encourage, feed, and assist them. We can act-out as genuine children of our One Heavenly Parent, by reaching-out to *all* our sisters and brothers with openness and welcome, and kindness and respect. We can speak-out against bigotry and injustice, and advocate for fairness and equality. We can lobby for more peaceful and constructive uses of our nation's tremendous power, riches and resources. Like responsible caretakers of this Global Household, you and I can faithfully and steadily attend to the tasks set before us, in joyful anticipation of our Master's return.

Like it or not, most of us will do a lot of waiting during this Advent Season – at the post office, in crowded shopping centers, sitting in stalled traffic, or standing in long lines. So here's a little holiday hint to help us make the most of those sluggish situations [a hint that's definitely meant for me, as much as for any of you]. Each time we find ourselves waiting in those kind of annoying or frustrating situations, rather than wasting our time wishing that things were *different*, we can use that time to think and pray about how you and I can actually make a *difference*:

By attending to those tasks entrusted to us;

By pursuing those opportunities that really do help other people;

By considering new and creative ways in which you and I can make this world a better place;

By remembering and reflecting on the life and love of Jesus Christ - the One whose birth and coming re-birth is the real reason for this Season.

Of course, in order to do these things, we're going to have to be aware, stay alert, look alive...and by all means, **STAY AWAKE!**