

Commentary to the 1st Sunday of Advent

Stay Awake and Hope



This week we begin the Church year with a call to stay awake. Paul tells us in Romans 13, our second reading, that we must wake from our sleep because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Jesus tells us in apocalyptic terms in Matthew 24 that we do not know exactly when the Lord is coming, we just need to be ready for Him. This is Advent, the season of hope. Our hope is that Jesus Christ will come a second time. Our hope is that the Lord's Second Coming will bring lasting peace. Our hope is that we will all experience this peace, either in this world or, if our lives end before the Second Coming, in the next world. Because we believe, because we have hope, our view of life must be positive, not negative. We are Christian. We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe that He has begun the wonderful victory of love over hate. We believe that the world as we know it is passing away, is being transformed into the eternal kingdom of God. We cannot allow ourselves to be negative people. It is easy to be negative. It is easy to focus on the immoral aspects of our society and cry out, "the world is going to hell in a handbasket." The media delights in giving us daily reminders of all that is wrong in the world. But the media doesn't shoulder all the blame for our negativity.

Many people are negative about everything, whether that be the nation, the world, the future, or even the Church. Perhaps some older people have had so many difficult experiences in their lives, that they allow the negatives to dominate their whole world view. Some younger people do this too. Maybe there are times that we all do this. When we see everything in a negative light, then we are implicitly denying Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Victor. He has won. He is winning. He will win. He has won. He has eliminated eternal death through his own death on the cross. He has defeated the power of hate through the power of His love. He is winning. Young people are focusing their concern on raising children for God rather than worrying about how children will affect their lives. So many of our young families are opting for large families, being more concerned with the love their children reflect than

with the financial cost of raising a child. And they really work hard to give the gift of faith to their children. Church is not a "Sunday thing" for them, it is lifestyle. So many of our high school and college people are making conscious decisions for Jesus Christ. Youth conferences, parish youth programs, and college campus ministries are flourishing due to the work of the Holy Spirit and the determination of parishes, colleges and dioceses to provide the best they can for the young. So many of our young men and women are entering seminaries and convents.

They want Jesus, and they want to bring Jesus to others. They want to be heroes for Christ. How can we look at these young, and all those who are making daily decisions for the Lord and not realize that Jesus is winning? There is great hope. The world is not going to hell in a handbasket. It is going to heaven with committed Catholics and other Christians leading the way to the Lord. And He will win. We believe with every fibre of our being that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Victor. The dark elements of the world will fade away. Evil will no longer attack us. Jesus Christ will return the world to its original state, the world as God always intended the world to be, a place of loving God and loving neighbour. So does that mean that we should ignore the immorality we are bombarded with? No, we need to stand for that which is right. St. Paul tells us in the second reading that we should have nothing to do with the darkness that envelopes so many. He lists a few of the sinful ways of his times, orgies and drunkenness, promiscuity and lust, rivalry and jealousy. We could add many of the ills of modern society as part of the darkness. Notice, though, that St. Paul's emphasis is not on others. It is on us. He says that we need to be people of the light. We need to put on the amour of Jesus Christ. Our focus should be on our coming out of darkness and into the light, not on others. Let me make this concrete. People tell horrible stories about other people. There is gossip in the neighbourhood, the office, the school. There is bullying in the schools. There is darkness wherever there are people trying to destroy other people.

There are also times that we join in with the darkness. Someone says something about someone, and we add a few nasty comments of our own. Someone is declared to be unworthy of association with the important people in the neighbourhood, the office or the school, and we join in by ignoring that person. We can decry the way that some people destroy the lives of other people, but we need to recognize that we are inclined to join them in these sins. St. Paul tells us that we must not be part of the evils of the world. We need to come out of the darkness and, as the first reading says, walk in the light of the Lord. It is easy to point the finger at other people and to declare that the world is in bad shape because of them. It is difficult to point the finger at ourselves. It is easy for me to stand up here as a priest and say, "Because of this person or that group of people, our world is being destroyed." And it is easy for you to sit there in those seats and agree with me. Maybe you might even applaud because, you think, it is about time that somebody told it as it is and stuck it to those sinners.

That's easy for you to do, at least as long as you are not the one or part of a group of people who are being assaulted by the priest. It is so much harder to reform our own sins then to point at the sins of others.

Whether we are priests or lay people, we have got to be concerned with coming out of the darkness ourselves, not with what we perceive are the sins of others. And we do need to come out of darkness. We need to put up the fight against evil in our own lives. If we do this then we will be ready for our final union with the Lord. We need to stay awake. For the Lord is coming to fulfil our hope and the hope of all people. He is always ready for us.

We need to be ready for Him. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the assurance of what is hoped for and the evidence of things unseen. "Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed," Paul adds in our second reading. There is no reason for us to be negative with our world, with others or even with ourselves. We believe that Jesus Christ is coming again. We are people of faith. We are people of hope.

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