

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT - YEAR B – OLPH 2014
(Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:31-37)

Here is a **quiz for you**. You are sleeping. You are dreaming. A big lion is chasing you. You try to run away and you see a tiger coming in front of you. You turn sideways, but every side you turn to, you find a ferocious animal coming after you. How can you escape? The answer is: **Wake up**.

By waking up, one enters a whole new **world of reality**, different from that of the dream world. What was a huge problem in the dream state becomes a non-issue in the waking state. Dream state concerns and priorities lose their importance and new concerns and priorities take their place. For example, you discover that your problem is no longer how to escape from wild beasts but how to beat the morning rush and arrive early for work. We can relate to the change that occurs between a dream consciousness and a wake consciousness. A similar and even more significant change occurs when we move from a state of being spiritually asleep to that of being spiritually awake, when the soul is awake and alert to spiritual reality.

The **season of Advent** is a time for Christians to prepare for the **coming of the Lord**. Actually we remember three of comings of the Lord. First, we celebrate something that happened in the past, namely, the birth of the Messiah into the world which took place more than 2000 years ago. Secondly, we prepare for something that will happen in the future, namely, the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time to judge the living and the dead. And thirdly, we celebrate something that happens in the present, namely, the many moments of grace which are occasions for the Lord to come into the lives of Christians, into our souls as individual believers and in our midst as the community of the people of God.

Unfortunately, our preparation for Christmas is often a **very material affair**. For too many of us, Advent is the ultimate shopping season. We shop for gifts, for toys, for special food and drinks. Advent has become a time for overly material concerns, as we make sure we are not lacking in any gift item or toy, or food or drink for the celebration of Christmas. How sharply our attitude contrasts with that of the early Christians to whom Paul writes in the 2nd reading, "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7).

In **today's gospel**, Jesus admonishes and encourages his followers to remain alert in the spirit. He was about to leave them for an uncertain length of time. By their faith and commitment to Jesus, his followers are like people who have roused themselves from spiritual slumber. But the time of his absence would be a time of trial for their faith life when they would be tempted to doze off. He enjoins them to remain awake and watchful so that whenever he comes to them he would find them not sleeping but watching in faith, ready to welcome him.

Today we **enter the season of Advent**: a time of special preparation for the coming of the Lord. Mark's portrait of the doorman watching out to open for the Lord whenever he "suddenly" appears is an image

of what we are expected to be doing all year long but especially during the season of Advent. The doorman keeps awake in order to recognize and welcome the Lord at his coming. Faith, likewise, transforms us into people who are able to recognize the Lord and willing to receive him. Recognition is crucial because the Lord does not always come in easily recognizable ways. At Bethlehem he came in the form of a baby and people did not recognize him. In the Parable of the Last Judgment, which we heard last Sunday, he said he came to people in the form of the most needy and disadvantaged of this world and many did not recognize him. But true people of faith did recognize him and serve him in these people who live in the blind-spot of society. Faith is first a way of seeing, and then a way of living.

The “wicked” who were consigned to hell in the Last Judgment were probably waiting for the final coming of the Lord and failed to recognize him in his day-to-day coming. The shocker in that parable is that Christ comes into our lives in the form of the ordinary people and events of our everyday lives. We need to be awake in faith to recognize and serve Christ in these commonplace and routine encounters since it will do us no good to recognize him on the Last Day if we have not recognized and served him day by day.

Before we conclude, let us say a word about Jesus’ saying “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). This saying can be understood literally to mean that Jesus did not know the date of the end of the world. It can also be understood as a strategy meant to discourage the disciples from further inquiry into the matter. In either case the implication for us is the same: Put an end to idle speculations regarding the date of the Last Day. Open your eyes in faith to see God present and active in your life and in your world. Open your heart and your house to the Lord who comes to you daily in the form of the needy man or woman. This is the best way to prepare to welcome the Lord when he comes on the Last Day.