

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

"Be watchful! Be alert!"

A few weeks ago we heard St. Paul say, "We are children of the light ... and of the day ... let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay sober and alert."

At the time I quoted one commentator who put it this way: The followers of Jesus must not "snooze their lives away."

In this new liturgical year we will be reading the Gospel according to St. Mark, the earliest of the four Gospels, written sometime soon after the year 64 A.D.

Written, according to tradition, based the preaching of St. Peter, this Gospel was written during tumultuous times when the first Christians were being put to death and a Jewish revolt against Rome was brewing.

Towards the end of the Gospel Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Because of the circumstances surrounding its origin, the Gospel of Mark is full of urgency; it's short and to the point.

"Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come."

You and I live in a time of urgency as well ... We live with Covid 19 and the rising number of positive cases as well as deaths.

Perhaps you know someone, even a loved one, who has had the virus. Some of us have a relative who has died from it.

## 2

Today's First Reading gives voice to our lamentation and that of God's people throughout history, "O that you would rend the heavens and come down!"

For those who are sick and for those who care for them ...  
for the isolated elderly and the parents at their wits end ...  
for the youth whose lives have been interrupted and for  
those who have lost their jobs ...

... we cry out, "Lord, come and save us!"

As we experience sadness, fear, and perhaps even anger ...  
in the midst of these anxious times ...

...we are being stretched as people of faith to place our  
trust in God, praying in the words of the psalmist: "Give us  
new life and we will call upon your name."

As Christians, we are called to be people of hope.

St. Paul assures us, "God is faithful," and he tells us that,  
because of Jesus, we "are not lacking in any spiritual gifts."

Patience, fortitude, compassion towards others, the  
capacity to make sacrifices for the common good ...

... these are the gifts of the Holy Spirit - generously  
bestowed on us in Christ Jesus - that we hope and pray for  
now more than ever.

Advent is a time of expectant waiting.

Jesus came in history ... Jesus will come, returning in  
majesty ... but Jesus is coming to us now in mystery.

St. Paul reminds us that we wait for "the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" who comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

Jesus comes to us in our public prayer and in the time we spend in our private prayer throughout the day.

And, as I stressed last weekend, Jesus comes to us in disguise, in each other, in the people we least expect.

While we wait, we're not just sitting around with our hands in our pockets. As the prophet Isaiah cries out, "Would that you would meet us doing right."

My brothers and sisters, because the command of Jesus, "Be watchful! Be alert!" is so important, we devote an entire liturgical season to its message.

Christmas is not just the remembrance of a past event as it is the celebration of Christ's coming here and now.

Our Lord is always coming to us. Let us keep in our hearts the prayer from the beginning of Mass:

"Grant your faithful, we pray, almighty God, the resolve to run forth to meet your Christ with righteous deeds at his coming."

May our "righteous deeds" of charity, compassion, and self-sacrifice help us and others to experience the dawn of Christ's coming anew.