

Advent I  
11/27/2022

## BEING PREPARED

We've just celebrated Thanksgiving and we're entering the hustle and bustle of the commercial Christmas season with an endless series of decorations, advertisements, and songs saying this is the most wonderful time of the year. And then we hear of today's gospel, which is one of the those readings where we can wonder, *If this is the good news, I don't want to hear the bad news.*

If someone warns you about a big hole in the sidewalk, that person is helping, not harming you. If there are warning signs around the hole that you ignore, you put yourself at risk. To hear what we need to hear rather than what we want to hear is a gift. So too the warnings we hear in Advent, repent, stay awake, be prepared and so much more, are gifts to us. Perhaps that message and the Advent season *is* the most wonderful time of the year, that can draw us out of so much that is bad and even sinful.

Having been a Boy Scout, hearing Jesus' words about being prepared, strike a chord with me. The Boy Scout motto is, *Be Prepared*. We not only hear about this in today's gospel, the whole Advent season is a time of preparation. We *first*, prepare and look *forward* to Jesus' final or second coming and *second*, as we journey through this season, we look *back* preparing to remember his human birth.

*Be Prepared*. How do we do that? –The first way comes earlier in this gospel, *Stay awake!* We can't go without sleep but we can strive to make sure our hearts stay awake, working to stay awake emotionally, spiritually and morally. One author noted that sometimes we can live our lives as sleep walkers. We can do our work, keep up our routines and do everything on auto-pilot, not paying attention to what is happening, and not letting our faith in Christ be the rudder that guides the ship of our life. Advent is a type of wake up call to leave what can be a sleepwalking slumber and instead live lives of intentional faith.

So staying awake is one way we prepare ourselves. Another way is found in the words of Isaiah, perhaps some of the most beautiful words of the Bible. Isaiah speaks of the nations, the gentiles journeying towards Jerusalem and *seeking*

instruction from God. Do we desire that instruction? Do we seek it out or do we simply say, OK whatever. I'll do the minimum and that will be it.

God's instruction comes through his word, do we ever take the time to listen to it or read it at least some? God's instruction comes through the teachings of the Church and we have a rich, two thousand year tradition to draw from. Do we ever do that? Are we afraid that God's instruction will cramp our style and call us to be different? Short answer, yes on both counts. God's instruction calls us not only to be different but to be better and ultimately to walk in the freedom of God's children and not sleepwalk in our own mediocrity.

Isaiah goes on, *They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.* In other words, instruments used to destroy life are to be transformed into instruments that nurture life. There are swords people may wear on their belts and there are smaller swords known as our words. These can be sharp, painful and maybe even deadly. Our pride can be a type of spear that attacks others. But those swords can be transformed into plowshares of goodness, truth and service. Those spears can become instruments to nurture and bring forth good fruit. We call that conversion, ongoing conversion. What's a sword you hold right now and how can it be transformed this Advent?

How else do we prepare ourselves? St. Paul gives some sound advice in today's second reading. Both about what not to do and what to do. He too, speaks of being awake, putting off the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light. He then gets specific about what not to do: drunkenness, promiscuity, lust, rivalry and jealousy and that list is by no means complete but you get the idea. But he doesn't leave it there, he goes in a positive direction—*put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* This too is conversion turning away from the bad and turning toward the good, or rather, turning toward the one who is good. Or as Isaiah puts it, *Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

We prepare ourselves by putting on the armor of light which is another way of saying that we stay close to Jesus. We prepare by *keeping our hearts awake* and rising from the slumber of what can be a sleepwalking life. We do it *by seeking out God's instruction and letting it transform our lives* turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. We do it *by going out with the bad and by putting on the Lord Jesus.* One of the most important ways to go out with the bad is to share in

the Sacrament of Reconciliation where God's mercy is there to lift us up and show us that there is another way.

This Advent, in addition to Forgiveness Friday, when on December 16 confessions will be heard from 9AM to 9 PM, there will be over twenty other opportunities to share in this sacrament. We put on the good by faithfully and worthily sharing in the Eucharist where Jesus continues to come not just into our world but into our hearts.

Let us ask for the grace that this Advent and always, we may be ready for the coming of Christ; through hearts that are awake, that seek instruction and embrace ongoing conversion putting on the Lord Jesus and walking in the light of our God. Maybe this is the most wonderful time of the year.