

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT – YEAR “A”

It is a ritual as old as humanity. Every human being faces it each day. Some meet it with disdain while others welcome it with joy. Typically it begins with a blasting, ringing sound. But for some it unfolds in almost automatic fashion. What is this age-old ritual? It is the experience of waking up and embracing a new day.

On this First Sunday of Advent the Church issues a wake-up call. In the second reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, Paul states, "Brothers and sisters: you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand."

In short, the Church says, "Wake up, and come in to the light." St. Paul adds, "Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

This spiritual awakening is similar to our everyday ritual in as much as it involves two important actions. First, there is the action of looking. The experience of looking accompanies our every day wakeup. For example, from the moment we open our eyes, we begin looking. We look into the mirror, we look out into the window, we look at the clock, we look at the newspaper etc. So too, we in this Advent Season are called to look around us and within us. Essentially, we are called to look within and get rid of the darkness of sin by making a good Confession. We are also called to look around and do our part to prepare the way for Jesus. And above all, we are called to look beyond for the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

To look at and for these realities is easier said than done because much of society will be looking elsewhere at secular things. Society is preparing for Christmas but in many cases -- without Christ. We need, for our part, to work hard in these days to keep the Christ in Christmas -- for as they say, "Jesus is the reason for the Season."

The second action that is part and parcel of this spiritual awakening is listening. The experience of listening begins with the sound of the alarm and continues throughout the day. We listen to the news, we listen to the toaster or microwave, we listen to the clock to tell us it's time to go and we listen to those around the breakfast table. This spiritual awakening calls us to listen just the same but with a deeper sense. In these four weeks of Advent, we are encouraged to listen to the voice of the Prophets who foretold the coming of Jesus. And we are called to listen to the voice of the Spirit in prayer. In a real sense, we are challenged not only to pray more in these days but also to listen more in our prayer. The act of listening is just as difficult as looking because of the influence of society. Society wants us to listen but only to those commercial messages of deadlines and spending etc. Amid the distracting noises of the season, God speaks to each and every one of us with a particular message.

There used to be a commercial for coffee that stated, "The best part of waking up is Folgers in your cup." Well indeed, there is nothing like a good cup of coffee in the A.M. This Holy Season of Advent, however, reminds us that the best part of waking up is facing a new day, pregnant with new hope and possibility, to look for and listen to God. Advent promises not only another day but a day with the Lord, and we must not only wake up but also heed the command of Jesus in today's Gospel who says, "Stay awake!"

So on this First Sunday of Advent, as the Church sounds the wake up call, let us rise from our slumber, come out of darkness and with the eyes and ears of faith -- look and listen!

Have good morning.