

## Advent 1B - 2020 (liturgical year 2021)

Wake up! Wake up before death wakes you up. In a less dramatic expression that's a virtual motif in the Gospels. Jesus is always telling us to wake up, to stay awake, to be vigilant, to be more alert to a deeper reality. What's meant by that? How are we asleep to depth? How are we to wake up and stay awake?

How are we asleep? All of us know how difficult it is for us to be inside the present moment, to not be asleep to the real riches inside our own lives. The distractions and worries of daily life tend to so consume us that we habitually take for granted what's most precious to us, our health, the miracle of our senses, the love and friendships that surround us, and the gift of life itself. We go through our daily lives not only with a lack of reflectiveness and lack of gratitude but with a habitual touch of resentment as well, a chronic, grey depression, Robert Moore calls it. We are very much asleep, both to God and to our own lives.

How do we wake up? Today there's a rich literature that offers us all kinds of advice on how to get into the present moment so as to be awake to the deep riches inside our own lives. While much of this literature is good, little of it is very effective. It invites us to live each day of our lives as if was our last day, but we simply can't do that. It's impossible to sustain that kind of intentionality and awareness over a long period of time.

An awareness of our mortality does wake us up, as does a stroke, a heart attack, or cancer; but that heightened-awareness is easier to sustain for a short season of our lives than it is for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years. Nobody can sustain that kind of awareness all the time. None of us can live seventy or eighty years as if each day was his or her last day. Or can we?

Spiritual wisdom offers a nuanced answer here: We can and we can't! On the one hand, the distractions, cares, and pressures of everyday life will invariably have their way with us and we will, in effect, fall asleep to what's deeper and more important inside of life. But it's for this reason that every major spiritual tradition has daily rituals designed precisely to wake us from spiritual sleep, akin to an alarm clock waking us from physical sleep.

It's for this reason we need to begin each day with prayer. What happens if we don't pray on a given morning is not that we incur God's wrath, but rather that we tend to miss the morning, spending the hours until noon trapped inside a certain dullness of heart.

The same can be said about praying before meals. We don't displease God by not first centering ourselves in gratitude before eating, but we miss out on the richness of what we're doing. Liturgical prayer and the Eucharist have the same intent, among their other intentions. They're meant to, regularly, call us out of a certain sleep.

None of us lives each day of our lives as if it was his or her last day. Our heartaches, headaches, distractions, and busyness invariably lull us to sleep. That's forgivable; it's what it means to be human. So we should ensure that we have regular spiritual rituals, spiritual alarm clocks, to jolt us back awake—so that it doesn't take a heart attack, a stroke, cancer, or death to wake us up. (Fr. Ron Rolheiser)

### **Where Is Authority?**

The British writer Arnold Lunn tells about one time he was on a boat trip when a certain lady was plaguing him with theological questions. He answered her with quotes from the Bible and from the teaching of the Church but the woman would not accept what he said. Then he interrupted her to say, "you must be a very inexperienced boat traveler. As you got on the boat I noticed that you put your left foot on board first. Everyone knows that you will have bad luck if you step on a boat with your left foot first!" The next time she came on board he noticed that she nearly tripped into the water in her effort to step aboard right foot first. Lunn thought it remarkable that she would believe the infallible Lunn in something that he had just made up, and that she would not accept the authority of the Church or the words of Scripture. So, too, we tend to complicate our lives and our prayer by looking for the extraordinary, when the Lord is to be found most often in the simple and in the ordinary. (by Gerry Pierse from [\*The End of the World... Again?\*](#))

### **Second Coming - Readiness**

While on a South Pole expedition, British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton left a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through. His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, "It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!" They replied, "We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, 'He may come today.'" (Source Unknown)