

## Ordinary 32A - 2017 - IC/AS

I was maybe 5 or 6 years old and was too excited to sleep. My parents had informed me that my Uncle Bob was coming to visit, sometime during the night. It was a special visit. Bob was bringing his new wife, Kayoko, from Japan to meet the family for the first time. Uncle Bob was the stuff of legend for a young boy. He was in the Air Force, stationed in Japan, and he got to fly airplanes for a living. This was back in the day when air travel was less pedestrian than it is today. Not only was flying a big deal, but Japan was exotic and mysterious and the idea of an Aunt from Japan was something great beyond my imagination.

But since they would be flying on military aircraft, the travel was unpredictable and we didn't know exactly when they might arrive. We only knew the visit would be brief, by morning they would be gone.

My parents had warned me to go to bed and go to sleep right away so that I could wake up for the visit. But I couldn't sleep. It was too much to anticipate and too much for my little brain to comprehend to allow me to quickly fall to sleep. I lay awake listening for the door, ready to bound down the stairs. I fought sleep as long as I could before succumbing to peaceful slumber.

I awoke the next morning to the bitter news that Uncle Bob and Aunt Kay had come and gone. My parents had tried to rouse me, but I was so deep in slumber that they couldn't get me to wake up. The only consolation I had was the present of a toy air force jet that was left behind. I was inconsolable. (by Luke Bouman)

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 it 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 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. (by Ron Rolheiser)