



THE DISCOMFORT OF ADVENT

This year Advent kicks off on Sunday, November 29 and our first Sunday reading is taken from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 13:

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all:

‘Watch!’”



I'll be the first to admit, this passage of Scripture doesn't exactly "comfort" me. Couldn't we start the season with something more positive? Usually as I go into Advent, I prefer to conjure up images of choirs singing by candlelight, tinsel-dressed Christmas trees or sitting around the fireplace watching cheesy Hallmark movies with the family. Instead, here we have Jesus sort of pulling off the cozy blanket, and cautioning us to "watch out!" Jesus is always comforting, except when he's not.

Don't get me wrong, I don't think there's anything wrong with all the cute things I just mentioned. I'm a total sucker for the holidays. But if choirs, trees and movies are of *ultimate* value to us—that is, if the Advent season is *only* or *mainly* about those sorts of things—then you'll miss the bigger picture. That bigger picture is that because we don't know when Christ will return, we ought always to live our lives in a state of watchfulness for Him.

To be clear, this doesn't mean that we should be beset with fear or panic. What it does mean is that we ought always to be spiritually alert. Goodness knows, if there was ever a time where the world was panicked and on the lookout, it's now. "Will our country continue to be so divided?" "When will we beat COVID?" "Will my kids ever be able to feel normal again?" All fair questions. I wonder though, do we go about our lives with the same sense of urgency when it comes to our relationship with God? For me, the answer is usually...well, you can guess.

The Gospel reading prompts me to ask myself,

"If Jesus returned today, would I be ready for Him, or am I little too tied to my own agenda, those less-than-ultimate, secondary things?"

I believe that Advent is an opportunity for reflection and mindfulness as we head into a new year that's fraught with uncertainty. It's the perfect time to let Christ arrive in new and powerful ways, to be alert to His call for your life. It's the right occasion to resist spiritual inertia by going a little crazy with your forgiveness, compassion and love.

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Friends, be a little discomforted by Christ's call this Advent. It's good for you. At the same time, maintain your faith and your hope, knowing that the Lord will indeed return to His house. When He does, be ready for Him!

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