

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: MARK 13: 33-37

Today, we enter the season of Advent. Advent is a time of waking from darkness to light, from hopelessness to hope, and from hatred to love. In the Gospel, Jesus says, "Be Vigilant at all times and stay awake," Because you do not know the day when your Master is coming. How can we be Vigilant, Stay Awake, and Be Prepared? This is possible only through our prayers and penance and by sharing our blessings with others.

One day, one of the disciples of Buddha -- the founder of Buddhism -- came to Buddha and asked a question: "Are you a God?" Buddha replied, "No." Again, the disciple asked, "Are you an Angel?" Buddha said, "No." And again, the disciple asked, "Are you a Prophet?" Buddha said, "No." Then the disciple asked, "Who are you?" Buddha answered, "I am the one who is "Staying Awake." This means that Buddha was aware of his own life and he knew what was going on in his life. His thoughts and actions were in his own control and he lived by them. This is why Buddha answered to his disciple; "I am one who is "Staying Awake" always."

Today the question is, "Are we "Staying Awake" or are we staying asleep?" If we are awake, we are able to be aware of our own lives and ready to accept our own weaknesses and struggles, and ready to change our lives. Then we are being watchful and are awake! Jesus comes during every time in the poor, the outcast, the lonely, the despised, and all those we reject. Stay awake! Be alert!

Why are we not alert? Because we get distracted by so many things: by our own pleasures, by our own laziness, by our own jealousies, by our own pride and selfishness. And we are just human! How can God expect us to be alert and to keep watch? There is

only one possible solution: Let us love God more and more. Then we will wait for God more and more.

Our every act of kindness and love and every act of self-sacrifice for another is a small step in welcoming Jesus into our midst. Likewise, every act of hatred and every act of selfishness strengthens the power of evil that is destroying our world.

Advent also gives us a message of hope and faith. We all need hope! Our Holy Father Francis affirms this: "We are saved by hope." When Jesus came, Jesus helped people to continue to hope in God. Jesus helped the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and the poor had the Good News preached to them. Jesus taught people that as children of God nothing could separate them from the love of God. All they needed to do was to hope and trust in His promise.

Let us ask ourselves: "Are our Advent and Christmas times to renew our faith and commitment to God?" If not, then Christmas is really just a winter festival. If we use the days of Advent as an opportunity to reconcile with those who have hurt us, if we use Christmas as an opportunity to share our times and treasures with the less fortunate, if we look for ways to be more loving to others, especially those within our own homes and communities, then we will "be vigilant and stay awake" to welcome Jesus in our hearts and homes.!