



St. Jude the Apostle Catholic Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

The Weekly Homily *The First Sunday of Advent*

November 26th and 27th, 2011
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*“Be watchful! Be alert!
You do not know when the time will come.”* (Mk. 13:33-37)

As we begin today please allow me to ask you this question: when you're driving around the city (usually in traffic), trying to get where you need to be on time (but running behind), and you're coming up on a yellow light—what do you do? Be honest. A couple of months ago I had been at my Mom's on my day off (usually a Friday) and needed to run to the store real quick for her. My 4 year old nephew, Brendan, wanted to ride with me. So we're on our way. I wanted to get there and back in a descent amount of time, but it was 5:00pm on a Friday on Jefferson Highway, no less, so you can only imagine what that was like. At one point I was trying to make it to a green light but then, of course, it turned yellow. I realized my options immediately. I could either blow right through it or I could stop. Now given the fact that he's a pretty smart kid I kind of felt he was waiting to see what I would do. So I stopped. And there we were. Sitting in heavy traffic. I took that opportunity then to ask him a question. “Bobo” I said, “what does green mean?” He responded, “Go!” I then asked, “what does red mean?” And he said, “Stop!” Then I thought, “O.K. let's see how smart you really are. Bobo tell me, what does yellow mean?” He sat there for a moment and thought. Then he blurted out, “SLOW DOWN!”

My friends, on this the First Sunday of Advent I suggest to you that this is exactly what Jesus is saying to us. His exact words? *“Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.”* Time? Time for what? Well, the most important interpretation has to do with the time of the second coming of Christ—that moment when, as we heard in last week's Gospel on the feast of Christ the King—Jesus will return to gather us unto himself. But this passage can also challenge us to consider 2 other aspects of time: the personal time, the number of days that you and I actually have on this earth and most importantly, how we are living them; and also the reality that we never know for sure when the next time will come when God asks us to help someone in need. Often that opportunity comes unexpectedly, but it does come, often in a time and place that we may not be considering. And then we're left with the choice of whether or not we will just blow right through the moment or stop and do what God asks.

You see, it's all about the gifts of time and life. And for us to be as appreciative as we possibly can be, Jesus calls us to "*be watchful...to be alert!*" Or as my nephew reminded me that day, "to be careful!"—not in the sense of being afraid or anxious but just in the sense of being a little more aware. Aware of the precious nature of life itself, aware of our surroundings, and aware of those in need.

I could be wrong but it seems to me that as we grow older we either become more alert and watchful—more careful, in the Gospel sense—or less so. Maybe that's a question we can ask ourselves today, not only those of us who are older, but maybe even those of us who are in our later high school years. "As I have grown older, have I become more or less watchful and alert?"

Here are a few everyday examples, areas of life in which we are called to be as watchful as possible. Ask yourself if you connect with any of these:

Let's start with the practical but important ones: perhaps we exercise less but still eat in an unhealthy way; or we know we need so many hours of sleep in order to be healthy but still we burn the candle at both ends. Maybe we find ourselves giving in to what author Wayne Muller calls the "violence of busyness".

Then there are the examples that are so deeply connected to our spiritual life and our spiritual happiness: maybe I need to forgive someone or ask forgiveness but still I keep putting it off. Maybe I do so because of fear or anger, instead of courageously seeking to be an instrument of healing. And here's one that we can all relate to: I want to pray—I want to pray more, pray better, take more time each day but still I keep saying to myself, "I'll get to it eventually."

This is a time of year when many of us indeed do take a good look at ourselves and how we're living our lives. That's good. It's a time of year when many of us do extra good things for those in need. This is good too. But Advent by its nature is designed to be a time of stopping. It's a time when we are challenged to do what our clergy retreat director said to priests back in October, namely, "to immerse ourselves in the silence of God." This is a season in which we are reminded that our calling is to do more than just slow down. Our calling is to try to take time daily to stop and listen to God in our lives.

Maybe that's the question to ask ourselves as we begin yet another Advent. Will I just simply blow through these next 4 weeks (like blowing through a yellow light, in a hurry to get somewhere)? Or will we make the conscious effort to stop, "be careful", and become more alert and watchful?