

Today's Mass marks the beginning of Advent and a new liturgical year. This time is meant to prepare us for the coming of our Savior in the flesh as one of us - the Incarnation of Christ. We eagerly await the arrival of the baby Jesus in the manger at Christmas. But in her wisdom, the Church uses this First Sunday of Advent to remind us that we also await the Second and Final Coming of Christ at the end of time.

We just heard Jesus tell His disciples, "Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come." He can't get much clearer than that. It's a mystery kept secret by God, but this hasn't stopped people from trying to predict when it will happen. Countless people have attempted to predict the Second Coming of Christ. Martin Luther predicted it would happen by the year 1600. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, predicted 1836. Televangelist Pat Robertson predicted 1982 and then April 29th, 2017. Jerry Falwell predicted January 1st, 2000. Ronald Weinland, founder of the Church of God Preparing for the Kingdom of God predicted September 29th, 2011 then May 27th, 2012 then June 9th of this year.

These are just a few of the predictions that have come to pass over the years. The list goes on and on and the predictions aren't limited to religious people either. Even Charles Manson got in on the action. He predicted 1969. No matter who they are, they claimed to have been privileged to pry into the mind of God and discover the undiscoverable. But the one thing they all have common is that they were all wrong.

These misguided efforts miss the whole point of what is revealed for us to know. The point is not when or where or how. The point is that it's inevitably going to happen. Jesus will come back again. And He won't give us a heads up. It's enough for us to know that His coming is certain, even if we can't mark it on a calendar.

But if this is the case, then why are we, as a people, so infatuated with wanting to know exactly when it will happen? I have a theory as to why this is. I think it's because most of us are natural procrastinators. The gift of time is both a blessing and a curse. If we think we have time, then we can wait to change. We don't have to live differently. We don't have to stop committing the same sins over and over and over. We have time to repent. We have time to change our way of life. We have time to make God a priority in our lives – THE priority of our life.

I liken it to kids who are left at home by themselves with a list of chores to complete before their parents get back. Maybe some of you can identify with me. I never started my chores as soon as their car pulled out of the driveway. I estimated when they would return and then estimated how long my chores would take. After some simple math, I knew when I needed to start the chores in order to be done by the time they returned. In the meantime, I watched TV, played video games, and goofed off. The problem came when my math wasn't accurate. Sometimes the chores took longer than anticipated. Sometimes my parents came home early. Sometimes I goofed off too long,

You would think I would have learned my lesson after at least a couple of times. I didn't. And that's why the Church reminds us once again at the beginning of the new liturgical year that the end of the world will take everyone by surprise. Instead of trying to predict the future, Jesus wants us to prepare for it. Making predictions is a waste of time. Since we don't know when He will arrive, we can't schedule our preparation. Being prepared is an exercise of wisdom that every disciple should take to heart. The Lord is calling each of us to always be in a state of readiness.

Being ready is especially important because there are dire consequences from being caught unready. Not everyone will be invited into the Kingdom. Jesus makes it very clear that

some will be left behind – not left behind on earth but left out of heaven. This may come as a scary proposition but we shouldn't take Jesus telling us He will return as a threat, but as a promise – a reassuring promise of salvation and victory, of light in our present darkness. If we're always in a state of readiness, it doesn't matter when He returns. He will find us waiting and prepared.

Easier said than done though. We get caught up in the everyday affairs of life. In our Gospel reading, Saint Matthew is not necessarily saying that the people in Noah's time were evildoers. They were just careless toward the things of God. They were preoccupied with earthly things. There's nothing wrong with these activities, except that they can be all consuming. In their case, they kept them from recognizing the telltale signs of an impending flood and were swept away.

The demands of our everyday life are merciless. There's always more to do and not enough time to do it. At times, the constant activity may be boring. At other times, it may be exciting. Either way, it breeds a lack of attention to the demands of God.

This world is a place of forgetfulness. Or, as our Gospel puts it, it's a place where we fall asleep. We don't stay attentive to the spiritual dimension of life. Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, working in the field, and grinding at the mill take all of our time and, more importantly, take all of our mind. They keep us from knowing something deeper and keep us from recognizing the telltale signs of losing focus on what truly matters.

The dominance of everyday activity is particularly true as we prepare for Christmas. Already busy people become busier. We have more work to do, trees and houses to decorate, gifts to buy, and food to cook. Unfortunately, this frantic preparation can put us to sleep spiritually. The rush of the season works against the message of the season.

So, what's the solution? We're all busy people. We can't simply retire from everyday life for the next four weeks in order to pray constantly. But even so, God has something He wants us to do this Advent and every day of our lives for that matter - watch and hope. These are the Christian attitudes that should accompany us in every moment.

To watch means to stay awake to the spiritual side of our lives, as Jesus advised in the Gospel, to put on the armor of light, as Saint Paul encouraged in our second reading. To watch means to live pro-actively, not passively, doing everything we do in such a way as to please God and benefit our neighbor.

To hope means to always keep the future in mind, to remember that the pleasures and pains of this life are passing, to look forward to heaven with just as much eagerness as we look forward to Christmas vacation, or to the presents we will receive on Christmas Day.

Brothers and sisters, there will come a day that will be our last on this earth. The Lord will fulfill His promise to return. When He does, will He find you awake?