



## More than Words

**A weekly resource for Sunday Liturgy ...**  
*Only by encountering Christ and opening ourselves to his goodness is our weariness soothed, our energy quickened, and our lives expressed in the joy of the Word being made flesh in us today!*

### **Be Alert!**

*In the first reading, Isaiah offers the vision of a future when all nations stream to the dwelling place of God, listen to God's instructions, and choose to live God's ways of peace and justice. In the gospel, Jesus warns that we must keep ourselves ready at all times for the coming of the Son of man when this vision will be fulfilled. In the second reading, Paul declares the hour of fulfillment is now, and we must act accordingly. Being ready for the final coming of God's kingdom, then, is not a passive state but an active one. Part of this activity is consciously choosing to journey toward the God who is coming: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord" (psalm). This journey will require twists and turns in our manner of living. It will be no small undertaking. But the reward will be great, and the journey itself will bring joy.*

## Gospel, First Sunday of Advent, November 30

—Mark 13:33-37

**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!'"**



### *Exegesis*

*Mark writes about 10 years after Paul's martyrdom, he still presumes Jesus will return in his and his readers' lifetime, even though Jesus is taking a long time doing it.*

*We can compare Mark's situation to a grade-school experience of a teacher having to leave the classroom. Usually, as she was going out the door, she'd say something to the effect of "I'll be right back, so you better not misbehave." And the class did not—for the first two minutes. The longer she was gone, the more trouble the class got into. When the door finally opened and the teacher stepped into the room, there was .... to pay!*

*That's precisely what Mark is trying to avoid. He wants everyone to be in his or her place, doing exactly what the returning Jesus expects them to do.*

To get his point across, the evangelist uses the twin images of being asleep or being awake; being conscious or being oblivious to what's happening around us. He employs a situation with which anyone can identify. The key virtue for Christians around the year 70 is simple: "Be watchful! Be alert! Be doing what Jesus expects you to do when the door of the Parousia suddenly opens."

## Reflect



Four times in this gospel, Christ commands us, "Be watchful!" or "Watch!" While we are to watch for Christ's Second Coming, that future can be elusive for us. What is immediate and manageable is to watch for Christ's coming now into our midst. Being watchful and alert for the Second Coming is not enough; we must consciously seek to identify Christ already present now. If we are pro-actively watching for everyday encounters with Christ, he will surely not find us "sleeping," neither now nor when he returns. The Second Coming becomes real for us in our encounters with Christ in the here

and now. Christ's glory becomes real for us in our encounter with Christ in the here and now. Our watching for Christ's coming is heightened by seeing God in the simple, everyday things we do. Our lives often seem to bog down with the endless "sameness" of things. We spend Advent in the time and place we always live, and we still can find Christ anew because he is ever making us anew. When we encounter Christ, we actually encounter who we are now and who we are becoming. The work of Advent is to "Be watchful!" so that we grow in being Christ's Presence for others.

## Respond

Advent itself is a metaphor for Christian living. As Advent is a progression toward the celebration of the Nativity, so is our daily life a journey toward the fullness of Life to come. We need only to "Be Alert."

- ◆ Christ's Second Coming means to me . . . I watch for it best when ...
- ◆ I find myself truly alert to Christ's Presence now when I ....
- ◆ What helps me recognize Christ's presence in everyday encounters is ...

## Act

We are the servants left in charge; we are the ones who watch and wait for the master's return. The gospel illustrates for us how we are to be during our watching: we are not only to watch for Christ, but we watch Christ. From him we learn how to reach out to others. Our work is futile when it serves our own ends; it is fruitful when it manifests the very work the Son came to do—bring justice and peace to a weary world.

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