

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Well, in too many families we've already seen an end to the Thanksgiving Family Dinner tradition in favor of Black Friday, which begins on Thursday morning; Small Business Saturday is over; cyber Monday awaits us, and the Eagles stuffed Dallas. And Advent only begins today.

Many think Advent is a time to get ready for Christmas. Practically speaking, it is. Some may already be getting a migraine thinking about it all—lights and trees to put up; parties to attend; cards to send; meals to plan and prepare; gifts to buy, presents to wrap, and cookies to bake. Did I say cookies to bake?

But, really the Advent season is about more than getting ready for Christmas, which celebrates the first of the three comings of Christ, born into humanity as one like us. His second coming, of course, was as the Risen Christ who overcame death and the grave. But Advent really has us looking forward to His third coming when He will arrive in all His Glory.

Few of us give much thought to the Gospel truth that Christ is coming again in glory, except for a few rather eccentric Christians who are all caught up in that they call “the Rapture”. Yet, biblically, it is impossible for us to ignore this teaching. History has a direction. One day Christ will return for us and claim our world for Himself. It is an amazing and wonderful promise about our future and the future of our world. Today we are called to prepare for His Coming in Glory.

In telling this story, I'm not sure that Jesus is directing it to the disciples in front of him then or the ones sitting beside us today. He tells of a man

going away who puts his servants in charge, each with an assigned task. He tells the one at the door to keep watch. Then, looking at the disciples in front of him, but perhaps speaking to us and the ones sitting beside us, he says, “Watch, therefore, you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming...” Now, notice his words, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning...”

One commentator suggests that these four times—evening, midnight, when the rooster crows, and at dawn—may each have a significant relation to the following events in St. Mark’s Gospel.

It is in the very next chapter that St. Mark tells us, “when it was evening, Jesus ate his very last meal with his disciples, and tells them, ‘one of you will betray me’”. Evening is the time of betrayal.

Think about that for a moment. How might we betray Christ? If this Advent is all about Christmas hoopla, rather than reflecting on the deeper meaning of Christ’s Birth; God’s becoming human; and its impact on our lives and on our world? Could that be a betrayal of Christ? How much do we spend on Christmas gifts for family and friends? How much do we give to the poor? How much do we give to the Church? Might there be a betrayal of Christ in how we spend our money at Christmas?

What about midnight? St. Mark continues the story in Chapter 14. Immediately after the Last Supper, “They went to a place called Gethsemane...” Remember what happened at Gethsemane? Jesus asked his disciples to keep watch as he prayed. The Master was pouring his

heart out on this, the most critical night in his life, and those he asked to watch with him fell asleep. As someone once said, “Instead of standing on the promises, they were sleeping on the premises.” The obvious question is, “Could that have been us?” We are the Church of Jesus Christ. He has called us to make a difference in the world. Have we been sleeping on the job?

Once a man went to his doctor and asked if the doctor could help with a snoring problem. The doctor asked, “Does the snoring bother your wife?” “No,” said the man, “but it disturbs the whole congregation.”

Are we sleeping as the Body of Christ? Jesus told us to make disciples of all people. Recently, we celebrated the 160<sup>th</sup> (175<sup>th</sup>) Anniversary of Our Lady of Consolation (St. Malachi). We don’t even have 160 (38) households worshipping with us on any given Sunday, except, of course, on Christmas and Easter. Is it time to wake up and go about the calling Christ has given us, by inviting a friend to come worship with you?

In the evening one betrayed him. At midnight, they were all asleep. We know that it was at cockcrow that Peter denied him and ran away weeping bitterly. Peter wept for denying he even knew Jesus. Have you wept for denying Christ in the sinful conditions of your life. When was the last time you went to confession? Could the crowing of the rooster not be a call for you to turn back to the Lord with your whole heart by seeking forgiveness and reconciliation in the Holy Sacrament of Mercy?

The evening of betrayal, the midnight of sleep, and the crowing of the rooster are all preparation for the dawn of resurrection. They also represent our situation as we await Christ’s return. We are imperfect people who live in an imperfect world. We still live in a world of betrayal, a world in which even the Church on whom Christ relies is asleep, a world still depending on God’s grace as its only hope. We

celebrate Advent during the darkest time of the year. It is not a celebration of darkness though. It is a celebration of the light that has overcome darkness. It speaks of that day that is to come, the Day of Glory. “What I say to you, I say to all: ‘WATCH’”!

And did I say something about baking cookies?