

Keep awake therefore,

for you do not know

on what day your Lord is coming.

Growing up,

after school,

somewhere between 4:30 and 5:30 in the afternoon,

the house got busy.

I would say this hour in the afternoon

was the most anxious for my mother.

Supper had to be ready,

the house needed to be picked up,

and the table set

so that when dad came home from work,

he'd be in a good mood.

I didn't know this then,

but he hated his job.

He worked for the phone company,

climbing poles and repairing downed lines.

We always looked forward to him coming home,

but dad was in a bad mood after work most of the time.

It took him a bit to shake off the day before he became approachable.

So, when he came home and these things were not done,

and, God forbid, dinner was not ready,

My dad let you know about it.

I think what made it so stressful for my mother

is that she often had to have all the preparations finished

by herself within this hour.

She would tell us to help,

but playing war with dudes three blocks over,

riding bikes, or watching reruns of the Brady Bunch

seemed too important to our schedules.

We knew dad would be home soon,

but not exactly when.

We knew dad wanted things done when he arrived,

but we got lost doing other things.

As an adult,

I understand how different that hour

before my dad came home

must have felt for my mother.

She understood the shortness of the time

and the urgency of being ready.

Advent is about time and preparation.

We mark time in Advent with four candles in the wreath,

symbolizing that three Sundays from now,

On December 25th, we will celebrate Christmas.

Advent is a time to prepare and get ready –
and I don't mean buying all the gifts on your list -
I mean to get ready for the miracle
of God becoming human,
Who lived and walked among us,
The Church tells us how to experience this miracle by getting ready.
The season of Advent requires preparation
and preparation requires our time.
But time seems to be in short supply
while distractions increase at an exponential rate.
If you had told me 30 years ago
that today I would be carrying around
a pocket-sized mini-computer,
capable of accessing information from anywhere on any subject,
I would have also asked for the jet pack that comes with it.

Oh, and it plays music,

takes great pictures

and allows me to send them instantly to anyone . . .

and to everyone.

Events from across the country and around the world

are captured and sent to my phone

within minutes of it happening.

I'm now overloaded with catastrophes around the world.

War, poverty,

global warming, pandemic

And the next mass shooting.

Our brains are overloaded with distractions.

The new technology

that is always promised

as a way to regain some of our precious time

seems to do the opposite.

Do we have more or less time than our grandparents did?

Our schedules are overflowing

and we are running as fast as we can,

Seemingly getting nowhere.

Like Lent,

Advent is a season where we are tasked

to get our spiritual houses in order.

How do we find the mental space and the time

to focus on God's coming

in a world that we move through at a sprint,

a world where mass shootings

no longer have the shock value it once did?

When you hear the story of the baby born in a stable

so long ago and far away,

does it feel like a fable, a story to tell children on Christmas Eve?

How do we reconcile the reality of our lives

with the tiny stable and the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes?

The temptation is to believe

that our world is moving faster

and farther away from the world Jesus was born into.

In Advent, we recognize that in this present darkness,

we wait for the Messiah to come

and make this broken world whole.

In Advent, we wait by preparing for his coming.

We prepare by focusing on the needs of others,

By taking stock of our lives

and to focus on the things that really matter.

Each new liturgical year

repeats the same wisdom over and over:

our lives begin and end in God.

Time moves and gets faster the older we are.

During that time

we do things we regret.

We're led astray.

It doesn't take much

for God to remind us that

Only God is immortal.

Each breath we take is a gift.

It is in Advent

we turn inward and examine the state of our souls

we recommit our faith in Jesus

to the daily practice of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

We light candles and say special prayers.

We are called to draw closer to one another and invite others in.

We remember the life of Jesus,
his words, his deeds, and his death and resurrection.

We confirm ourselves as Christians by our actions.

But Advent calls us to prepare
for much more than the birth of Jesus.

Advent is also a time to make ourselves ready
for Jesus' second coming.

This is a very different task than the preparation for Christmas.

We know when Jesus will be born,
we know what will happen after that.

We think we know the end of the story.

But, the crucifixion and resurrection are just the beginning
and only God knows what the next chapter holds
and when it will be written.

Where will we be when that day comes?

What will our distractions be that leave us unprepared?

Matthew warns,

“Keep awake therefore,

for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

“You know what time it is,” the Apostle Paul says to the Romans,

“It is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;

the night is far gone, the day is near.”

Are we ready?

Or, are we distracted?

This Advent,

let us make it a daily practice

to make God

our first and last thoughts of the day.

Schedule time.

Make space and pray.

Be ready.

“Therefore you also must be ready,

for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”