Commentary on the Gospel: "Stay awake"

Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent (Cycle B), with commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 13: 33 - 37)

Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake —for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—

lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.

Commentary

We have entered the season of Advent, a time of conversion and preparation for our Lord's arrival. In the Gospel for this Sunday we read Jesus' forceful words that are addressed to everyone: "Be on guard, keep awake" (v. 33).

To emphasize his words, Jesus uses the example of the landowner who goes off to another place and leaves everything in the care of his servants. He especially charges the doorkeeper to stay awake and to look after the house until his master returns. The role of the doorkeeper is important because if he were to fall asleep or become distracted, thieves

could enter the house and overpower the other servants.

Saint Augustine sees in the vigilance of the good doorkeeper an image of our capacity to love: "Keep awake with your heart, with faith, with charity, with good works."[1] To "stay awake" means first and foremost to love others. It means to look upon everyone with affection and understanding, being aware of the needs of those around us, in whom we can recognize Jesus and prepare for his arrival.
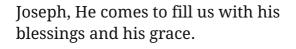
Pope Francis said in regard to this Gospel passage: "The watchful person is the one who, amid the noise of the world, is not overwhelmed by distraction or superficiality, but lives in a fully conscious way, with concern first and foremost for others. In this way we become aware of the tears and the needs of our neighbors, and we also

recognize their human and spiritual strengths and qualities. The watchful person also then turns towards the world, seeking to counter the indifference and cruelty in it, and taking delight in its beautiful treasures which also exist and are to be safeguarded. We need to look upon others with understanding in order to recognize both the misery and poverty of individuals and society, and also the riches hidden in little everyday things, precisely right where the Lord has placed us."[2]

The enemy to this vigilant concern for others is the bad sleep of negligence. It is, Saint Josemaria tells us, "the torpor of selfishness and superficiality, getting wrapped up in thousands of passing experiences, and not coming to grips with the real meaning of the world and life. A bad thing that lethargy, which smothers man's dignity and makes him a slave of sadness!"[3]

To fall asleep, therefore, means to center our life on our own ego and its desires and concerns, and fail to pay attention to others. This torpor always brings sadness and does harm to those we love. Pope Francis said: "The watchful person is the one who accepts the invitation to not let oneself be overpowered by the listlessness of discouragement, by the lack of hope, by disappointment. He or she rejects the allure of so many vanities in the world, for which personal and family peace can sometimes be sacrificed."[4]

Jesus' call to vigilance in today's liturgy asks us to show an attentive charity towards others, as an effective preparation for his coming. Jesus does not come into the world as a severe judge who seeks to punish us, but as a helpless and poor Child who asks us to welcome Him, content with a manger meant for animals. In the arms of his Mother and Saint

Joseph, He comes to fill us with his blessings and his grace.

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[1] Saint Augustine, *Sermon 93*.

[2] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 3 December 2017.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 147.

[4] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 3 December 2017.

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