

Homily (1st Sunday of Advent) – 12/3/2017

Imagine the mail delivers your first Christmas card. Maybe it already has. Was it one of those scenic ones?

You know where the picture shows a snowy evening in a farm setting. And there is this horse pulling a man seated on a sled carrying a freshly cut Christmas tree, making its way through the snow to this house that has smoke curling from its chimney a warm intimate scene. Or, maybe it was one of those Frosty the Snowman happy holidays greetings or maybe it was a card from a family or friend with a picture of sons and daughters and a state of the union about their past year: have settled into our new home, our son graduated from high school, we remodeled the kitchen. Maybe you received a religious Christmas card. You know with a picture of a babe in a manger with Mary and Joseph and angels singing in the nighttime sky. But be warned. Be careful. Be awake. Each of those Christmas cards in their own way, can corrupt your Christmas. How?

They can take over your imagination. Set up false expectations. For each card in its own way is saying this is the ideal Christmas scene. This is what you should be feeling. And, unless you live up to this ideal feeling, unless you feel it in your home, in your family, in yourself you are falling short. You failed. Everyone else is having this warm, fuzzy, intimate experience. But not you, you failed Christmas. That is why the upcoming Christmas season can be the perfect dynamics for depression. You set up an ideal feeling that can never be experienced and it is in the air we breathe.

The airwaves crackle with these false expectations. Do you know how many Christmas specials are on television? There will be over 40 specials. I am not speaking about Babes in Toyland or the Nutcracker suite. There is the Sponge Bob Christmas, a very merry cricket one called in the nick of time and Olive the other reindeer.

Look we need to have some fun. We need a good party. Given the world news pour the egg nog, put up the mistletoe. But expectations can be dangerous to your emotional health and also to your spiritual health. That is why Jesus in the gospel is saying "Stay awake, you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming".

Now this passage is not so much about your death or the end times. Rather in this section of the gospel Jesus is preparing to undergo a terrible Good Friday which ends in a glorious Easter Sunday. And this series of events changes human existence.

Someone put it this way: If we understood the magnitude of Jesus life, death and resurrection, it would be the spiritual equivalent of the Copernican Revolution. You recall we used to believe the sun rotated around the earth then saw that it was the earth rotating around the sun. Such a new perception changed our old perspective. That is what we need.

If we perceive what Jesus has done it would change our perspective on how we ought to enter into Advent and prepare for Christmas. In the gospel Jesus is saying set your spiritual alarm clock. Don't be lulled to sleep, God is still entering into our lives. Entering in ways that match His innocence in a manger and suffering on a cross. That is the danger with idealized pictures of Christmas. They become the standard to judge ourselves. The commercial message of our culture is what you have is not enough, and who you are is not enough, and by the way who you are is unimportant.

All this can lull us to spiritual sleep and this undermines the real life you already have now. Someone put it this way: Yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is gift that is why we call it the present. Each of us has been giving the present of human life. And the people in situations around us are presents to be loved and cared for. In fact buy gifts with God's eyes. Rather than shop till you drop, check off each person on your list as a gift from God. Above all do not see the holidays as ideals to be realized, as a project to be worked on, as people needing to change into some idealized figure. Rather imitate Michael Angelo sculpting the Pieta. Michael Angelo said he did not create beauty in his sculptures. He only brought out the beauty that was already there hidden in the stone. Each of us has hides our beauty, bring it out. It is in our families and friends, bring it out. And it is especially in the poor and forgotten. Bring it out. What is the take home message: Watch! Stay spiritually awake!