

SUNDAY REFLECTION WITH FR. TONY
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT YEAR B
THEME: STAY AWAKE!

Today we begin a new Liturgical Year and a new season of the church's liturgical calendar. The season of Advent is a time when we commemorate the first coming of Jesus into the world. That is what we celebrate at Christmas. But the Church uses the season of Advent also to remind us about the need for us to be prepared for the Second coming of Christ. That is what today's liturgy is all about.

The central message of today's liturgy of the word is Jesus' warning for us to be alert, watchful and prepared because his coming, coinciding with the end of the world, can occur at any time.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah prays for God's active presence in the Jewish community returned from Babylonian exile so that they may remain faithful to their God. In the second reading, St. Paul prays for the reconversion of the Christians in Corinth who have misused their gifts and Charisms and remain unprepared for Christ's Second Coming. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were not ready to face the Day of the Lord because they were misusing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus uses the parable of the gate-keeper to talk about his Second Coming, at the end of time or at the end of the world. He says: "Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake! You do not know when the appointed time will come." Jesus knew that if an expected event did not happen as quickly as expected, people would stop doing the things they ought to do. The usual attitude is to relax and procrastinate: There is still time, I am still young, I have to enjoy my youth to the fullest, and when I'm old I will draw closer to God. There is a saying among my people in Nigeria that procrastination is the first child of the devil. The Gospel reading today continues the Advent's passionate appeal by telling us to stay awake and be prepared, for the Son of Man will come at an hour we do not expect.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, the season of Advent offers us another opportunity for a fresh start. We could use this year's Advent to begin a new relationship with God and our neighbors; or to deepen our already existing relationships; or to restore the broken ones. It is usual for us to have our homes illuminated by beautiful decorative lights during this time. Let this practice not be mere beautification; let the lights be Sacramental indication of an interior transformation of our personal and family lives. We are called to light up our lives and our surroundings. We have to know that Jesus is the reason for the season. He is Lord not just for the visible and physical; but also Lord of the body and soul. So, the regular external preparations: Advent wreath, shopping, exchange of cards and planning vacation with family and friends are important but more attention should be paid on the spiritual aspect.

Finally, the season of Advent calls for a change in our life style. We normally plan our schedule and fit many things into it, the things that are important to us. As we begin the season of Advent today, we need to reflect on the following questions; Is Jesus and our faith at the top of our agenda this season? Is our prayers and spirituality among our priorities on the List? What plan do we have for God and his Church during this season?

As we prepare for the Lord's coming, let us ask him to bless our preparations, so that he will meet our lives ready for him.