

First Sunday of Advent - A

No one but God knows when the coming of the Son of Man will happen.

So, we cannot plan for it in the same way we plan for a party, or some important event in our lives.

There has to be another way of preparing for it that has little to do with the way we prepare for other things.

The Gospel for today tells us as much when we hear Jesus say, "Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left."

Apparently, being prepared for the coming of the Lord does not depend on what we are doing: because the people described are busy about doing the same thing.

And still, one will be taken and one will be left.

Preparing for the coming of the Lord must have more to do with an inner attitude that we cultivate than with the everyday activities we get caught up in.

There is an inner vigilance and awareness that makes the difference.

No one can afford to quit their job and simply spend the whole day in prayer, waiting for the coming of the Lord.

What we have to work on is developing a way of being that keeps us from getting so caught up in the tasks of everyday life that we get caught off guard and the coming of the Lord surprises us like a thief in the night.

We can't afford to get lost in the world.

The spiritual writer John Shea tells the story of God and a man who were walking down the road.

The man asks God, "What is the world like?"

God replies, "I cannot talk when I am thirsty. If you could get me a drink of cool water, we could discuss what the world is like. There is a village nearby. Please go and get me a drink."

The man goes into the village and knocks at the door of the first house.

The door is opened by a young woman who is so beautiful that the man is speechless.

Finally, he recovers and says, "I need a glass of cool water."

"of course," she says, smiling, "but it is midday. Would you care to stay for some food?"

"I *am* hungry," he says, looking over his shoulder. "and your offer of food is a great kindness."

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He goes in and the door closes behind him.

Thirty years go by. The man who wanted to know what the world was like and the woman who offered him food have married and raised five children. He is a respected merchant and she is an honored member of the community.

One day a terrible storm comes in off the ocean and threatens their life.

The merchant cries out, "Help me, God!"

A voice from the midst of the storm says, "Where is my cup of cold water?"

It's easy to become lost in the world, even in the good things of the world.

The answer to the question, "What is the world like?" is that it is a place of forgetfulness, a place where we are tempted to fall asleep spiritually.

We forget to stay attentive to the spiritual dimension of life, especially now during this time of year when there is even more to do than usual.

How can we remain spiritually aware in the midst of the crush of everyday activity?

We may have to be sneaky about it. We may have to smuggle spiritual exercises into the world of work, little reminders that may not take hardly

any time at all, but give us a chance to "touch base" in the course of the day.

Carrying our rosary in the same pocket that has our keys—even that might serve as a reminder that there is a deeper dimension to life that we don't want to lose sight of.

Inside the door to the parish office building there's a little note, which reads, "You can open doors with a combination of charm and patience."

Some of us should probably tape a reminder to our dash board which reads, "Forgive them, Lord, they don't know what they are doing."

Spiritual exercises help us "stay awake through the night."

They may be rituals and prayers from our tradition or they may be things we come up with on our own—personal things we have learned to cultivate in order to stay focused on the deeper dimension of life.

They lead us to an attitude of vigilant awareness, and that can lead to the experience of the Lord coming into our midst in unexpected ways.

I wish you a good Advent of attentiveness to its deeper meaning and success in keeping the busyness of everyday life at bay.