

First Sunday of Advent – Year A (2019)

How many of you hosted Thanksgiving dinner? Well, then you know how things don't always go as planned.

The turkey doesn't quite look like Martha Stewart said it would. You don't have the pastor's favorite beverage (diet Ginger Ale). And none of your guests pay any attention to your one rule: "no conversations about religion or politics."

Almost always, when it comes to throwing a party, not everything unfolds as we would like.

And one thing that can really drive us crazy is when people don't show up when their supposed to: there are always those who show up an hour early, two hours late, or not at all.

"So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Today, we begin the holy season of Advent; the start of a new year; a time to commence our year-long pilgrimage with St. Matthew as our guide.

And, strange as it may sound, we begin not at the beginning, but at the end, the "finish line" so-to-speak, the destiny planned for us and for all of creation since the dawn of time.

It is also a time of judgement—when the choices we make in this life have eternal consequences. Jesus seems to continually encourage us not to be complacent in our spiritual lives, not to take for granted our relationship with God. In short, "**stay awake!**"

For two thousand years people have wondered when Jesus would return. Virtually every generation has felt that they were living in the end times. And yet, Jesus makes it quite clear that we simply cannot (nor should not) know when that day or hour will come.

In a very real sense, Jesus is telling us that tomorrow is promised to no one. All we have is this very day, this hour, this minute. And all he asks of us is to be faithful.

Being faithful. That's not too much to ask. I mean, don't we have a pretty good grasp on what it means to be a faithful Catholic? A faithful spouse? A faithful friend?

Being faithful: It's asking the question: Are the choices I make reflective of who I am? Do I make decisions that I will be proud of 10 years from now? Do I still care enough to live a good, generous, and God-centered life?

Advent invites us once again to not put off until tomorrow being the faithful person God created me to be today. God wants me to be that person right now, this very minute.

Advent is not just a remembering of something long ago, nor an anticipation of something far into the future. Advent is also a preparation for encountering the God who is right now in our midst; a God who wants to come to us in every moment, in every person, and in every situation.

But that will never happen if we continue to be like the host of the party who insists that people come on our time, when we expect them. God simply doesn't work according to our schedule.

Rather, God shows up when we least expect him. God is going to be the one showing up an hour early or an hour late: in the person we like and in the person we can't stand; in the family celebrations that bring us joy and in the tragedies that break our hearts; in our achievements and in our disappointments; in the wealthy neighbor and in the homeless person we cross the street to avoid.

God is in all those things, all those situations, all those people. God is everywhere. And he wants us to recognize him, acknowledge him, and let him in. The question is: will we? Can we let God come to us on his terms, and not on ours?

That's what Advent is all about. And so, let's make sure that our party is an open-house, and allow God to show up: in the early morning, in the heat of day, or in the dark of night. **"Stay awake!"**