

December 2023



“Be watchful! Be alert! May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping” (Mk 13:33-37).

You may have heard the story of that Rabbi who asked his students: *“How do you know when the night ends and the day begins?”* One answered, *“When you see an animal in the distance, and you know whether it is a sheep or a goat.”* Another said, *“When from a distance you can distinguish a cherry tree from a banana tree.”* *“That’s not it,”* the Rabbi replied. *“Rather, it is when looking at the face of any human being, you see a brother or a sister. If you are not able to do that, it doesn’t matter what time of the day it is, you still live in the night.”*

Advent is a time to distinguish and recognize Jesus Christ, the Light of the world and Prince of Peace, among so many little princes here in this world.

I guess most of us have seen one of those artists you find in squares or streets painting or drawing somebody’s face or doing a caricature right there, in a few minutes, while you wait. Once a drunkard, unshaven, dirty, and smelling, requested a portrait. Despite his bad-looking presence, he showed some dignity and pride. The artist dedicated more time than usual to do his job. Once ready he showed the portrait to the man who, surprised, said: *“That’s not me!”* In fact, he was well dressed and smiling. To which the artist replied: *“Yet, this is the person you can still become.”*

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That’s what God’s Word tells us. Maybe you and I are not yet ready for our portrait... Maybe we still have some dirt on us, some hope and much love are still lacking in our way of living and treating others... Maybe we still look for answers someplace else... other than in our Lord, the God who loves each and everyone immensely... Jesus is exhorting us to begin living as we should; to stop procrastinating and to begin living in such a way that if he came tonight, we would be ready and prepared for his coming. *(He is not a merciless judge but a trusted friend.)* An example may help us better. Jack rented an ocean cottage for a two-week vacation. Before driving to the beach with his wife, Jack made a solemn promise to himself that for the next two weeks, he would be the kind of husband that he knew he could and should be. And so he began. For two weeks he made no phone calls to his office. For two weeks he held his tongue when tempted to say something unkind. For two weeks he was thoughtful. For two weeks he was loving and caring. Only one thing went wrong on that vacation. And that happened on the last night. Jack caught his wife staring at him with a deeply concerned expression on her face. He looked at her and said, *“Honey, what in the world is wrong?”* Tears rolled down her cheeks as she said, *“Do you know something I don’t know?”* *“What do you*

mean?" he responded. "Well," she said, "last week I went to the doctor for a checkup. You've been so kind to me, Jack. Tell me the truth. Did he tell you something about me? Did he say I had cancer? Did he say I'm going to die? Is that why you've been so good to me, Jack?" It took a full minute for her remarks to sink in. Then Jack burst into laughter. Throwing his arms around his wife, he said, "You're not going to die. It's that I'm just starting to live." ... **Only when you love, you live...** Jesus is urging us to start living; to stop putting things off; to be on our guard against letting our life slip away without doing what we should be doing. More specifically, Jesus is urging us to approach this Advent the way Jack approached his vacation; to use it as an opportunity to begin living as we should. Saint Teresa of Calcutta used to say: "Each one has a mission to fulfill, a mission of love. At the hour of death when we come face-to-face with God, we are going to be judged on love; not how much we have done, but how much love we have put into the doing."

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A grace-filled Advent Season, a Merry Christmas and Year End to you all.

With deep gratitude, blessings, and peace,

Mark, s.x.