

GOSPEL*Mark 13:33-37*

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT XVI*27 November 2011*

Today, together with the Church, we are beginning the new liturgical year: a new journey of faith to experience together in Christian communities but, as always, also to be taken within world history so as to open it to God's mystery, to the salvation that comes from his love. The liturgical year begins with the Season of Advent. It is a marvellous period in which the expectation of Christ's return and the memory of his first Coming — when he emptied himself of his divine glory to take on our mortal flesh — reawakens in hearts.

"Watch!" — This is Jesus' call in today's Gospel. He does not only address it to his disciples but to everyone: "Watch!" (Mk 13:37). It is a salutary reminder to us that life does not only have an earthly dimension but reaches towards a "beyond", like a plantlet that sprouts from the ground and opens towards the sky. A thinking plantlet, man, endowed with freedom and responsibility, which is why each one of us will be called to account for how he/she has lived, how each one has used the talents with which each is endowed: whether one has kept them to oneself or has made them productive for the good of one's brethren too.

Today, Isaiah, too, the prophet of Advent, with a heartfelt entreaty addressed to God on behalf of the people, gives us food for thought. He recognized the shortcomings of his people and said at a certain point: "There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; for you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our iniquities" (cf. Is 64:6).

How can we fail to find this description striking? It seems to reflect certain panoramas of the post-modern world: cities where life becomes anonymous and horizontal, where God seems absent and man the only master, as if he were the architect and director of all things: construction, work, the economy, transport, the branches of knowledge, technology, everything seems to depend on man alone. And in this world that appears almost perfect at times disturbing things happen, either in nature or in society, which is why we think that God has, as it were, withdrawn and has, so to speak, left us to ourselves.

In fact, the true "master" of the world is not the human being but God. The Gospel says: "Watch therefore — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning — lest he come suddenly and find you asleep" (Mk 13:35-36).

The Season of Advent returns every year to remind us of this in order that our life may find its proper orientation, turned to the face of God. The face is not that of a "master" but of a Father and a Friend. Let us make the Prophet's words our own, together with the Virgin Mary who guides us on our Advent journey. "O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay and you are our potter: we are all the work of your hand" (Is 64:8).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Benedict XVI says Advent reminds us that life is directed towards God, not just the concerns of this world. What can help us stay spiritually awake amid the busyness of daily life?



Heart: When you look at your life at the moment, what is getting most of your attention and energy? Is it helping you turn towards God, or distracting you from him?



Hands: What is one practical way you can create space for God this Advent through prayer, reflection, generosity, or a change in routine?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be’.