

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 28-29, 2020, Cycle B

With this First Sunday of Advent, we enter our new liturgical year of 2021. "Advent" comes from the Latin word "adventus" meaning an arrival or "coming". Advent is the season that reorients our thoughts to the future. In fact, as we begin this Advent the Jesus of Mark commands us, "Be Watchful! Be Alert." In other words, be on the lookout for something new and exciting! Just what should we be watchful for, though?!

We hear the Prophet Isaiah cry out this weekend in our First scripture reading: "Oh, that you (Lord), would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you." Advent reminds us that, at the core of our being, we deeply yearn for God somehow to dramatically enter our lives, and make things right. Ever since the Coronavirus and COVID -19 have struck our world in December 2019, have we not been pleading with God: Lord save us from this misery. We can't even have normal human companionship, without threatening each other's lives. We are a people who yearn, who thirst with anticipation in our hearts to be healed, made whole: we desire completion. During Advent the Lord promises us that day will come when God will bind up our wounds and heal our brokenness; however, the Lord also tells us: "You do not know when the Lord of the house is coming." So, "Watch," Jesus says!

Does being a people on the "watch" mean we sit around waiting for God to act on His own? Of course not; the Lord Jesus warns us against laziness – God did not create us in His image for nothing. It is through us that God works to bring about His Kingdom. Paul the Apostle reminds us this weekend: "you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you await for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. You were enriched in every way." In Jesus, we have been blessed with many spiritual gifts, so that we can work along with God to bring in His Kingdom, while watching in anticipation for God to bring our work to completion. So, we have to do our part to bring the Coronavirus under control – we do the work of safe capacity, social distancing, washing our hands and wearing our masks! Those with expert knowledge in medicine and science do the work of developing therapeutic drugs and safe and effective vaccines. God expects us to work with him, not sit still.

In the short parable Jesus tells this weekend, the servants continued to work as they anticipated the master's return, while at the same time the gatekeeper watched. Jesus tells us the man who travels abroad, leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Jesus orders his followers both to work and watch. Watching and working for God's Kingdom are both important. We watch in contemplation and prayer, and we are also busy proclaiming and doing the deeds of the Gospel Jesus has assigned to us. We are not to be so watchful as to become lazy and expect God to do it all, nor are we to become so busy with our work entrusted to us, that we forget to be on the watch, forget just exactly what are work is all for. Unless we spend adequate time in the watchful contemplative prayer mode, we will lose our sense of purpose. Advent calls on us to quiet ourselves, stop ourselves and watch; spending more time in prayer, deepening our relationship with the Lord, so we may be rejuvenated, filled with enthusiasm for the work of the Gospel, Jesus has entrusted into our care. So be watchful, be alert!