First Sunday of Advent, Year B: Watchful Preparation for the Lord's Coming

Introduction On this First Sunday of Advent, the Church begins a new liturgical year, turning our focus toward the twofold coming of Christ: His humble birth in Bethlehem at the fullness of time and His glorious return at the end of history. In the Gospel (Mark 13:33–37), Jesus concludes His eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives with an urgent, repeated command: *"Be on your guard, stay awake."* Likening His disciples to household servants entrusted with specific responsibilities while the master travels abroad, Christ calls every believer to active, faithful attention. Advent is therefore not a season of passive waiting or sentimental nostalgia, but a spiritual awakening—a grace-filled summons to shake off spiritual drowsiness and being unaware, acknowledge our need for a Saviour, and prepare our hearts to welcome the Lord when He comes.

Opening Prayer Almighty and ever-living God, as we begin this sacred season of Advent, awaken our hearts from the slumber of sin and distraction, that we may run with eager charity to meet your Christ who is coming. Grant that, clothed in the armour of light and faithful to the tasks entrusted to us in your household, we may watch and pray with steadfast hope. Open our souls to receive your saving grace, so that whether you call us at evening, midnight, cockcrow, or dawn, we may welcome your beloved Son with joy and be gathered into your eternal Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Reading: 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!'

Gospel Reflection: Mark 13:33–37

In this brief yet piercing parable from St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus distils the entire posture of the Christian life into a single imperative: *"Stay awake!"* Notice that the master of the house does not leave his servants idle while he is away; rather, he leaves them in charge, *"each with his own task,"* appointing the doorkeeper to keep constant watch. Christian vigilance is never anxious waiting or idle speculation about the end of the world; it is faithful attention to the life of the soul and to the task at hand. By naming the four Roman watches of the night—evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn—Jesus reminds us that Christ comes to us across every season and hour of life: in youth and old age, in times of happiness and in moments of trial, in the sacraments, in the poor, and finally at the hour of death and at the end. Spiritual sleep happens gradually when comfort, routine, or unrepented sin dulls our longing for God. To stay awake is to live with an attentive, expectant heart, attuned to God and awaiting the coming of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus warns that when the master comes unexpectedly, *"he must not find you asleep."* What forms of spiritual drowsiness, busyness, or routine most easily lull us to sleep in our relationship with God today?
2. In the parable, the master leaves each servant in charge *"with his own task."* How does fulfilling our daily duties in our families, parishes, and workplaces with love and integrity become an act of watching for Christ's return?
3. The early Church prayed *Maranatha*—*"Come, Lord Jesus!"*—with deep yearning. What prevents us from genuinely desiring Christ's coming into my life right now, and how can Advent rekindle that longing?
4. Why is an honest recognition of our sinfulness and our absolute need for God's grace essential if we are to welcome the Messiah with joy rather than fear?

Rooted in Doctrine:

A. The Final Tribulation and Christ's Return in Glory (CCC 668–677, 769)

Catechism Commentary:

Although Christ already reigns at the right hand of the Father as Lord of history, His kingship is not yet fully visible, and the Church remains a pilgrim people moving through the trials of this world toward her heavenly perfection (CCC 668–672, 769). Before Christ's second coming in glory, the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers, unmasking the mystery of iniquity in the form of a supreme religious deception offering humanity an apparent solution to its problems at the price of apostasy from the truth (CCC 675–676). The Church will enter the glory of the Kingdom only through this final Passover, when she follows her Lord in His death and Resurrection—not through an earthly triumph of historical progress, but through God's decisive victory over the final unleashing of evil (CCC 677). Because the time of this final consummation remains hidden from us, Jesus' call to watchfulness protects disciples from both spiritual complacency and false apocalyptic speculation, anchoring our hope in the quality of our relationship with Christ who will judge the living and the dead when He comes in glory (CCC 673–674, 769).

Saint Quote: "He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms that it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near, but rather he who, whether it be far off or near, awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope, and fervent love." — *St. Augustine of Hippo*

B. "Come, Lord Jesus!" and the Grace to Welcome the Messiah (CCC 35, 451, 671, 1130, 1403, 2817)

Catechism Commentary:

Humanity is created with a natural desire for God, yet in order for us to enter into real intimacy with Him, God takes the initiative by revealing Himself and granting us the grace to accept His Revelation in faith and welcome the promised Messiah (CCC 35). From the earliest days of Christianity, this faith has found expression in the Aramaic prayer *Maranatha*—meaning either *"The Lord is coming"* or *"Come, Lord!"*—a cry that unites adoration of Christ's divine Lordship with ardent longing for His final return (CCC 451, 671, 2817). Every time the Church celebrates the sacred liturgy, she proclaims the mystery of Jesus *"until he comes,"* yearning for His

transfiguring manifestation in glory (CCC 1130). In a supreme way, this Advent longing is fulfilled in the Eucharist: each time we celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we eat the Bread of Life and drink the Cup of Salvation *"until he comes,"* receiving a real foretaste of the heavenly banquet while praying with the whole Church, *"Come, Lord Jesus!"* (CCC 1403, 2817).

Saint Quote: "We recognize a threefold coming of the Lord... In the first coming, He came in flesh and weakness; in this middle coming, He comes in spirit and power; in the final coming, He will be seen in glory and majesty." — *St. Bernard of Clairvaux*

C. Watchful Repentance: Acknowledging That We Are Sinners (CCC 827, 1431, 2677, 2839)

Catechism Commentary:

True Advent vigilance begins with radical honesty before God: acknowledging that we are sinners in need of mercy and purification. While the Church is holy because Christ has united her to Himself as His Bride, she clasps sinners to her bosom and is at once holy and always in need of purification, pursuing penance and renewal without ceasing (CCC 827). Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return and conversion to God with all our heart, accompanied by a salutary sorrow for sin and the firm resolution to change our life with hope in divine mercy (CCC 1431). In the Lord's Prayer, when we ask the Father to *"forgive us our trespasses,"* our petition begins with a humble confession of our need for pardon and our trust in His boundless mercy (CCC 2839). Likewise, in the *Hail Mary*, we entrust ourselves as *"sinners"* to the Mother of Mercy, asking her to pray for us *"now"*—in the decisive present moment of grace—and *"at the hour of our death,"* so that she may welcome us when our earthly watch ends (CCC 2677).

Saint Quote: "If you confess your sins, they will be forgiven; if you excuse them, they remain." — *St. John Chrysostom*

Practical Application

- **Make a Thorough Advent Confession:** Stay awake spiritually by clearing away the drowsiness of habitual or unconfessed sin so that Christ finds a clean and welcoming dwelling in your soul. **Action:** Examine your conscience honestly this week and go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation early in Advent rather than waiting until the last days before Christmas.
- **Sanctify the Watches of the Day with Brief Prayer:** Just as Jesus spoke of watching at evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn, punctuate your day with short moments of recollection so that your heart remains turned toward the coming Lord. **Action:** Pray the ancient Advent invocation *"Come, Lord Jesus!"* upon waking in the morning, before meals, and before going to sleep each night this week.
- **Practice Faithful Stewardship in Your Daily Task:** Christ leaves each servant in charge of a specific responsibility until His return. **Action:** Identify one duty in your family, work, or parish that you have been neglecting or performing half-heartedly, and offer it intentionally this week as an act of love for the Master of the house.

Intercessions To God the Father, who calls His Church to watch in joyful hope for the coming of His Son, let us offer our prayers with humble, repentant hearts:

Response: ***Come, Lord Jesus, awaken our hearts.***

- **For the Holy Catholic Church:** That purified by constant repentance and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, she may persevere through every trial and bear luminous witness to Christ until He comes in glory, we pray to the Lord.
- **For Civic Leaders and All Nations:** That God may grant wisdom and integrity to those in authority, guiding all peoples along paths of true justice, peace, and respect for human life, we pray to the Lord.
- **For All Sinners and Those Asleep in Spiritual Indifference:** That the grace of Advent may pierce every hardened or distracted heart, leading us to acknowledge our sinfulness and seek the mercy of the Saviour, we pray to the Lord.
- **For the Suffering, the Lonely, and Those in Anxious waiting:** That those enduring illness, grief, poverty, or anxiety during the long watches of the night may be consoled by the nearness of Christ and the faithful charity of their neighbours, we pray to the Lord.
- **For Our Parish Community and Families:** That our homes may become places of watchful prayer, forgiveness, and generous service as we prepare to welcome the Messiah, we pray to the Lord.
- **For the Faithful Departed:** That those who died in the hope of the Resurrection, sustained by the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the hour of their death, may be welcomed into the eternal joy of the Lord's house, we pray to the Lord.

Summary As we enter the season of Advent on this First Sunday of Year B, Christ's urgent command in Mark's Gospel—*"Be on your guard, stay awake"*—calls the Church out of spiritual drowsiness into active, joyful vigilance. Rather than speculating about when the end will come, believers are entrusted with faithful stewardship of their daily tasks as pilgrims journeying toward Christ's return in glory through the trials of history. Grounded in God's grace to welcome the Messiah, strengthened by the Eucharist in which we proclaim His death until He comes, and renewed through humble repentance that acknowledges our need for mercy, we unite our hearts with the Church across all ages in crying out: *Maranatha—"Come, Lord Jesus!"*

Closing Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, Master of the House and Desire of all nations, we acknowledge our sinfulness and our total dependence on your saving grace. Shake from our souls every trace of spiritual slumber, apathy, and pride, that we may keep faithful watch over the tasks you have entrusted to us. Nourish us in the Eucharist with the pledge of your glory, and unite our voices with your Bride, the Church, as we cry out in longing: Come, Lord Jesus! Grant that when you return in majesty, you may find us awake, clothed in grace, and ready to enter your eternal banquet, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.