

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT - YEAR B – OLPH 2011

“And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

(Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:31-37)

Welcome to Advent - and welcome to the **new missal**. Advent is a **season of expectation**, a season of hope and a season of patience. So we all hope that our expectations of the new Roman Missal will be fulfilled if we but patiently allow the new language to open our hearts to the great love of our gracious God.

For many people, two of the hardest tasks each day are **to get up and to go to bed**. They are not separate events but two sides of the same task. It is because we don't go to bed on time that we can't get up, and it is because we didn't get up early that we don't want to go to bed. The vicious circle!

Would that we experienced this problem only at the beginning and the end of a day! But it repeats itself throughout the day, in our 'waking' hours. We find it hard to finish things, and so we are seldom completely ready for the next thing when it begins.

Like the great spiritual teachers of all times, Jesus, kept saying, "**Wake up!**" He did not mean (as some have meant) that this life was a nightmare from which we would do well to awaken; Jesus had no hatred of this life, and would never have called it "a bad dream between two awakenings." Rather he meant that by being asleep we are missing the wonder of what God was doing. He meant something like that great line in Genesis, "Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!'" (28:16).

Advent is the season when we hear that wake-up call repeatedly, as in today's gospel reading. The master of the house, Jesus said, could come at any moment. Later, the first Christians expected the Second Coming of Jesus in their own lifetime, but as time passed they had to get used to a longer perspective. This was difficult for them, and they had to struggle to make sense of it. Peter did so by quoting **Psalm 89**, "To your eyes a thousand years are like yesterday, come and gone, no more than a watch in the night." (2 Peter 3:8). Paul had to tell the followers of Christ in Thessalonika to get back to work: "We hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living" (2 Thess 3:11-12).

“Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down!” cried Isaiah in today's first reading. Julian of Norwich (14th century) prayed to God for a deeper longing for God. She longed to long more for God. She called it a wound - “the wound of longing.”

Our world no longer struggles with this. On the contrary, we look for **complete fulfillment** through our own work; and we expect nothing to happen unless it is of a scientific nature. Many now expect nothing real from their religion, and some even see it as an obstacle to life. The myth is to think that pleasing only oneself doesn't close the mind. Nothing closes it more effectively. By God's grace we may feel some opening of the "wound of longing" in this Advent season. We are never finished with our work, and so we are never ready for the completely new. We need to be reminded again to look up from our frenzied labours, to wake up from our dreams, to awaken our spirit to the master who can come at any moment. "And what I say to you I say to all: **Keep awake.**"