

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

1st Sunday of Advent | For Sunday, November 29, 2020

Stay Awake! The Best Is Yet to Come!

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37



As we close one liturgical year and begin another, many of us are physically, emotionally, and spiritually tired. 2020 has been quite a year. While our liturgical year may have come to an end, our calendar year still has some time left before the numbers change again. It has been a year of upheaval, surprise, change, turmoil, anxiety, fear, confusion, disappointment, disillusionment, and detachment. We have been forced to "die" to so many things these past several months: expectations, routines, celebrations, institutions, and most importantly, treasured relationships. We have been asked to leave the familiarity and security of the past we hold dear and embark upon a journey into the unknown.

Surrounded by so much uncertainty and doubt, it is hard to have hope and stay alert and focused. We need to recharge our batteries. People of faith may find themselves murmuring a poignant question, "why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your ways?" Wandering is exactly what we are doing. We are like the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years, wondering where they will eventually find peace and a place to permanently call home. We ultimately want God to restore peace in our time, as if the fullness of peace was ever ours to enjoy in the first place. But we can hope. We know one thing for certain by now. This mess we are in is not something we can fix on our own. None of our problems ever are. It takes us a while to realize that, and some really struggle learning that lesson.

When we are tired, it is hard to do even the simple tasks, tend to daily business, interact in the community, nurture relationships, and pray. When out in public, one can almost hear a constant hum of anxiety. It's always there. People are scared. Yet, this new brightly shining liturgical year bids us to stand erect, stay awake and watch! What are we waiting for? The current pandemic, political struggles, and Church concerns all find us waiting for solutions to problems, resolutions to conflicts, vaccines for disease, and leadership that can truly be effective and trusted. Even though all of these are worthy pursuits and necessary, they are all worldly. Real hope is found somewhere else.

Do we believe that God is faithful, and that God will keep us firm to the end? Sometimes, we live life as if we are somehow going to fall apart if things don't go a certain way. We don't like times of disarray and turmoil. Knowing what we had, the discomfort and unsettledness of where we are and the uncertainty and unknowns of where we

will end, make being present to the moments of life and finding joy a difficult enterprise. We need real hope. These days it can be challenging even to pray. We may ask, are we being led through some kind of "dark night of the soul" or wonder if God has just moved on to someone else. Knowing that the latter is most likely not true, we can find themselves living with a spiritual and even emotional malaise.

Keep it simple these days. Remember what Jesus told his disciples when they asked him how to pray. Go to your room, close the door, speak to your Father (Dad) in private, and use the words found in the Lord's Prayer. Often, when life is derailed and we are experiencing loss, discomfort or confusion, a simple "Ave" or time spent with a brief, humble prayer is all we can do. It's a loving gesture that connects us with our source. It allows us to remember that God is the potter and we the clay. Even when nothing makes any sense, God still has our back. Moments of prayer, regardless of how deep or profound, allow us to see God's creative and restorative will at work. The often-difficult journey to God's Kingdom, paved with the virtues of faith, hope, and love is steadfast and eternal. The Divine Light that burns within every soul cannot be extinguished.

So, what is the real hope to which we are called? Hope is nothing other than having faith that by Love's power we will be led to discover something that will make sense. Real hope rests in the certainty that we are hard-wired for union with God and that God's Will is ultimately the creative, sustaining force behind all that we do. Walking with this hopeful certainty is the only way we can see light in those dark moments when what we really may want to do is give up and walk away. It is this joyful hope, rooted in God's promise that allows us to be vigilant, watchful, and awake. It gives us reason to stay the course, even when we may want to just close our eyes and get some sleep.

We have many examples of people throughout history who stand as witnesses to this wisdom. Even when brought to their lowest point and facing despair, they always found their way back to hope and followed the impulse to love. After all, didn't St. Paul tell us that in the end there are three things that last, faith, hope, and love? They are three intimate companions on the journey, a trinity of virtues that need each other in order to most perfectly radiate the joy that flows from God's tender loving face. They are the gifts, given to us who believe, that help us stay strong, simple, and focused when everything else seems lost and spiraling out of control. It is true that we do not know the time when Christ will come again. It's not for us to know.

The journey still requires patient and joyful watching, all while keeping a vigilant, alert eye and heart on what is right and true. Generation to generation God's power remains constant. It was this very power that brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, inspired prophets to speak challenging words of truth, raised Jesus from dead, and sent the Gospel message to a weary world. Do we think that we are any less important than the countless others who have gone before us? Now is the time for patient endurance and joyful hope. A weary world is still waiting to receive its Savior and rejoice.

Fr. Mark Suslenko

Instruction for Prayer

Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel: "Whenever you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in private." Now, do what Jesus asks and find a quiet place to be alone. Open your mind and heart to spending some time resting in God's presence. Try to be as present to these few moments as you can, bringing all that you are and everything that is happening in your life to this sacred space. Trust that God knows what you need. Don't worry about what to say or how to say it. Be present with love in search of Love. Desire that God's will and your will become one.

After a few moments, slowly pray as Jesus taught:

PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Offer a brief Thanksgiving to God
for simply Being who God is and
for making you into the person
you are. Rest with this affectionate
gratitude for a while.
Breathe in, breathe out.
Come, Lord Jesus! Come!