The readings for Sunday, November 29, 2026:
First Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm: Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18 (Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 NRSV)
Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Gospel: Mark 13:24-37

You may read the Gospel for Sunday and wonder if I've pasted the right lessons into the space above. You may have been prepared for angels appearing to Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph. You might have already decorated your tree and started listening to Christmas music; you may be hoping for a glimpse of Christmas in Advent.

Instead, again, you get this apocalyptic text from Mark, about tribulation, and a darkened sun and moon and stars falling from the sky. Yikes. Isaiah's not much better; we're not to the comforting texts yet.

But the end of this chunk of Mark is important. It implores us several times to watch. We're not very good at watching. We're not very good at waiting. These statements are true throughout the year, but they're especially true during the liturgical season of Advent. The pace of our socializing goes into full-throttle frenzy, and we give ourselves over to trying to create a perfect holiday. Then we spend the month of January nursing a cold (or succumbing to more serious illness) and the rest of the year paying our credit card bills.

Seen in this light, the Gospel chunk of Mark makes sense. The way we celebrate Advent is indicative of the way we spend the rest of the year, and in this way, the apocalyptic tone makes sense. So many of us are making a ruin of our lives. What can we do so that our lives do not end up in ashes?

The Gospel tells us to keep watch, and we might return to some ancient spiritual disciplines to help us with that. We think of Lent as the time of year for spiritual discipline, but Advent might be an even more important time, since our culture gives us more pressure in the season of Advent than Lent.

Return to the old practices. Light an Advent wreath each evening. Or buy yourself an Advent calendar. Those of us without children often let these traditions slide. Maybe we could take them up again. Add some devotional time to your day. There are many books set up specifically for Advent or you could resolve to read more of the Bible. Add some prayer time.

You might keep a journal to record your thoughts as you move towards Christmas. If

you don't have time to write much, write a haiku or a sentence to capture your thought for the day. Or take a picture. This practice can help you stay alert.

Instead of adding something to your life, you could subtract. Consider a fast of some sort. Give up sugar for Advent instead of Lent. Set your devices aside and give up time on the internet. Have a meatless day of the week to encourage you to remember that you have other ways to nourish your body and your soul.

You might decide to give some of your time and/or money to charity. Or you might resolve to help those charities in January, when the fervor of charitable activities at year's end dies down, and those organizations really need you.

Whatever you do, choose a discipline that will help you keep watch. When we train ourselves to be alert, we'll be amazed at how much evidence of Divine Love surrounds us every day.