

# 1 Sunday of Advent

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

*Mk 13:33-37*

How can I be watchful? Being watchful by definition is a very difficult task. I’m supposed to wait for something without knowing when it’s going to happen. Let’s say it again: I don’t know what is going to happen, I don’t know how it’s going to happen, I don’t know when it’s going to happen, but I strain my eyes to see it. I push my brain and heart to the limits. To read the signs announcing the event. “Be watchful and be alert.”

There are so many ways in which I have to be watchful on a daily basis. Waiting for a phone call from a friend. The flight schedules that are checked obsessively, in hopes that something delayed would not be delayed and something canceled might reappear. Looking at tomorrow’s page in my calendar.

There are also quick and intense ways. The joyful “keep your eyes open!” heard from an Italian taxi driver when I was overwhelmed by his city while he was masterfully navigating traffic and telling me about the peoples and places we were passing. There is a certain beauty in the ability to read this fast, crowded, colorful stream of human life and culture, passing next to me, and I have to keep my eyes open and my heart open to notice it.

Then there is a way preferred by artists. The famous, “If you don’t see it, you wouldn’t understand.” But I know that I can start seeing. I just need somebody patient to teach me. It might take years and great effort. It might take a lot of frustrations of missing the important detail, of not knowing what everybody’s talking about, of feeling like the only one who didn’t see. But then when I do see, I see the world multiplied by myriads of details and sounds and colors that were always there.

There are also ways which come to us without asking for permission. There are hours spent in waiting rooms and offices. There are long, heavy minutes measured by uncertainty and fear, waiting for a decision that will transform human lives. There are those strange moments in life when I try to catch a great opportunity for somebody I love or protect another person from something threatening. There are also moments when I am tired and sick and when I don't have hope but I am still waiting. And when I am truly surprised that actually anything happens.

Jesus relies on all of these experiences when he tells me to keep watch. He wants all of these moments of humanity to be elevated and purified and concentrated on one task. Why would Jesus want me to do it? Why is it so important to him that I stay alert, that I watch?

God is the giver of life and he is the life itself, which means he is always new and he is always now. That's why he wants me to look for him the way he is. "Be watchful and be alert" is the language of never-ending now that is endlessly creative and holy and that wants to be recognized by broken human eyes. Sinfulness and guilt blur the once-familiar image of God in my heart, and I can't really recognize his face. All I have is my own emotions, my own images, confused with my own fears, delusions, and hopes.

The call to watch is really an invitation to reconfigure my life so that I am not afraid to welcome the life of God into my life. That I would not get tired of the presence of God which is an unchanging, eternal movement. This eternal movement will feel to me like an always new event. Like a return of somebody very familiar from a long journey to a foreign land.