

## **Sleep Walking**

First Sunday in Advent (Year A)

December 1, 2019

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Sleep walking is a real thing. Some people can move, function, and operate while sleeping with no awareness of what they are doing. In the morning, they might be surprised to hear about all the things they did at night!

While it is somewhat of a funny issue, sleepwalking is a good analogy of what we all do most of the time. Many of the things we do are not free human acts, but mere repetitions of what we are used to doing. Whether we do this as a defense mechanism, a way of coping with reality, or just being lazy, going through the motions is easier, but it does not lead to a fulfilling life. It is no different in church. We say the responses, stand and kneel at the right times, and come up for communion, all of out habit. That in itself is not fulfilling. Worst of all, we can convince ourselves that this is what God wants.

In today's Gospel from *Matthew*, Jesus challenges our spiritual sleepwalking through life. If that is our mode of operation, we are going to miss God's action in our lives. Something new and significant will happen and we won't even realize it. Jesus says, "therefore, stay awake." He continues, "for you do not know on which day your Lord will come."

Beatrice Chestnut, an author and psychotherapist, likes the imagery of being asleep versus being awake in her practice. She explains, "our 'sleep' is the unexamined belief we all have that we live lives of relatively unlimited freedom, when the opposite is true: We respond in predictable, repetitive ways according to the dictates of our early programming, much

like uniquely specializing machines. And like machines, we have no power to grow out of this pre-programmed condition as long as we have no conscious understanding of how our existence is limited by our programming (3)...The ability to wake up is not only possible, but also an inherent part of being human...many ancient wisdom traditions say that this task of waking up to become aware of who we are represents the purpose of human life on earth." (*The Complete Enneagram*, 5) The shift from sleeping to being awakened is the goal of life. Even though it may be hard, it is within our capabilities as human beings. We are not machines and we can change. For us Christians, God wills it.

This Advent is a chance for us to wake up. If we have grown lax, been cutting too many corners, or been indifferent to God recently, these next four weeks can help awaken us to life. There is so much excitement built into this time of year that we can use it to our advantage.

*Advent gives us time to wake up so we can be fully awake for the birth of Christ.*

In what parts of my life have I been sleepwalking?

St. Paul's words to the Romans in our second reading are addressed to us: "Brothers and sisters: You know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed; the night is advanced, the day is at hand."