



## “Be Watchful”

Advent invites us to take stock of the times of our life, because each year for a month it throws our spiritual clocks out of synch. Chronological time, governed by the rising of the sun from the darkness, has still a month to go before its year ends; but the rhythm of time that shapes our worship, liturgical time, begins the new year a month early, on the First Sunday of Advent, because it is governed by the Rising of the Son from the dead. “Behold,” He says, “I make all things new.”

Chronological time predictably follows the same relentless rhythm: sunrise, sunset; tide in, tide out; people come, people go. The ultimate purpose of this ceaseless repetition exceeds our mind’s capacity to grasp. For all we can tell, it’s time going nowhere—time empty of meaning, with no purpose or point of arrival, time with no one waiting in welcome.

Throughout the liturgical year, by contrast, we go out to meet the One Who Is to Come to gather us into the Fullness of Time that He is. Advent is the time to decide which time we shall live in.

According to the Prophet Isaiah, if empty chronology is all we know how to live in, we must call on God to come down to meet us in our journey through time. “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down . . . . Would that . . . we were mindful of You in our ways.”

To make ourselves mindful, we should heed the voice of Advent: “Be watchful! . . . You do not know when the time will come.”

I thought sure I knew when our train to Madrid would come that December eve in Toledo thirty years ago as the cold, fog-choked day turned to cold, fog-filled night. In the frigid gloom of the street it brought comfort to think of the warmth we’d sit down to on our 6:00 p.m. northbound.

Only it *wasn’t* the 6:00, we suddenly realized; it was the 5:30, and my watch showed 5:15 with well over a mile yet to walk (and two hands full of luggage). That train from Toledo was the last of the day to Madrid. If we missed it, we’d never make our 5:00 departure the next morning for Rome.

Suddenly it was all or nothing. We had not heeded the hour, and we desperately feared that time had run out. It seemed too late to try to make it, but it never occurred to us to give up hope that we could. So we took off running faster than I have ever run before or since. Down the dark narrow streets we raced to the station. There our train was still sitting, poised for departure. We had run in hope; we boarded breathless with joy; we rode in the complete satisfaction of peace.

Those cold Toledo streets come to mind every year on the First Sunday of Advent. In the opening prayer we ask the Father for “the resolve to *run forth* to meet” His Son with deeds worthy of His coming.