

First Sunday of Advent

God is the only one who knows when the “day of the Lord” will come. So it’s not something we can prepare for in the way that we do for other things. We can’t count the days to it like we might be inclined to do for Christmas.

We can’t put down what we are doing because we see it arriving, and get ready for it like we would if we saw a relative pulling up in the driveway, or received an e-mail with their travel itinerary.

Preparing for the day of the Lord has to be done in the midst of everything else we are doing, and has to work on a different level than the usual preoccupations that consume our time and energy.

And that’s the tricky part. Because those preoccupations have a tendency to be all-consuming, to take up all our attention and leave us without having given even a thought to the day of the Lord.

Today’s Gospel passage highlights that fact in that it presents two examples of people getting on with the everyday tasks of life, but somehow one of each pair of workers has managed to be ready for the day of the Lord, and the other has not, even though, they are working at the same thing.

“Two will be left in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.”

Preparation for the day of the Lord does not mean stopping everyday life. The examples Jesus gives do

First Sunday of Advent

not have one out in the field while the other is praying, or one grinding at the mill while the other is in the temple. They are both doing the same thing.

So the difference must lie in how they go about the everyday tasks of life. To be ready for the day of the Lord must involve something that we do at a level deeper than the one that gives attention to our everyday tasks—something that can fill the cracks as it were between all the other things that we get involved in.

The story I grew up with about my grandfather was that he was a man of deep prayer. As he moved about from one chore on the farm to another, he took that as an opportunity to be in a spirit of prayer.

That state, putting on the mind of Christ, would have gone without notice to the casual observer, who might have concluded that he was simply going about the business of farming like any other farmer.

You might not have noticed unless you engaged him in conversation and on that basis discovered that there was a lot more going on inside of him than just thinking about milking the cow.

We all have our thoughts as we go about the business of the day. And some of them are idle: they don't really have anything to do with what we are doing. They proceed uninterrupted even as we turn on the turn signal on the drive home or pour a cup of coffee during our morning break.

First Sunday of Advent

There's so much potential for using the time in which our thoughts are idle to stay awake to the coming of the Lord. That's actually a primary form of prayer that we have to discipline ourselves to engage in. Otherwise, we do run the risk of missing the moment of the Lord's visitation.

One of the Benedictine sisters at their monastery in Beech Grove, Sr. Meg Funk, wrote a book I found extremely helpful during my years of working in formation. Its title is "Thoughts Matter."

Today's gospel is an encouragement to pay attention to our thoughts that do not seem to matter that much. Because there is the place where so much development in our spiritual life is available.

It's sort of like discovering that what we've been throwing away as garbage is actually worth a lot of money. If that were to happen, we'd pay a lot more attention.

Staying awake is all about paying attention, and especially about paying attention to our idle thoughts. They can be replaced without much further ado with something much more intentional: opening our minds and hearts to the action of God's Holy Spirit, and being awake to his coming, not only on the day of the Lord, but even today if he so chooses.