

# Catholic Review Column: Advent, the Perfect Spiritual Wake-up Call

The Scriptures for the First Sunday of Advent contained two messages that could well serve as a guide for us as we embark on our Advent journey toward Christmas: “Don’t be drowsy” and “Be vigilant – in the right way.”

How much we are like the Apostles who could not stay awake even an hour as the Lord experienced the agony of our sins in the Garden of Olives. The drowsiness we feel at the end of a long day may be symptomatic of another form of drowsiness, spiritual drowsiness. This is when both body and soul are asleep ... oblivious to the presence of the Lord.

Spiritual drowsiness is like putting our souls on “airplane mode.” We temporarily turn off our ability to receive signals from the Lord. He sends sign after sign that he loves us and wants to free us from our sins, but we just go about business as usual.

Spiritual drowsiness gets worse when we become mired in serious sin. Sin is like a drug that may make us feel pretty good for a time, but it dulls our spiritual senses ... it makes us less and less aware of God’s goodness and less and less open to the needs of those around us; Advent is a spiritual wake-up call.

The Lord also wants us to practice vigilance, but not in a self-centered way that is at odds with the Gospel. No, when he says, “Be watchful! Be alert!” he is calling us to a vigilance of love. It is akin to the way we wait for children to get home from school or a spouse to return home from work or a business trip. While we are looking forward to their return, we are also busy preparing for them, making sure that all will be in order when they walk through the front door.

Advent is a season of expectation. It’s when the church puts us on high alert to the coming of the Lord. Indeed, every Sunday, in the creed, we look forward to that day when “(Christ) will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” And at every Mass we speak of waiting for the Lord with “joyful hope.” But in the meantime, the Lord wants to walk through the front door of our hearts. He loves us.

He gave his life to save us. He wants to live at our side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free us ("Joy of the Gospel," no. 164). When Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts, he wants to find us awake and prepared. He wants to find in our souls the warm welcome of love; He wants to find in us the good order brought about by virtuous living, habitually keeping the Commandments in the spirit of the beatitudes.

The Lord wants to find in us plenty of room for himself, but also for those in need, especially the poor and the vulnerable. If we are spiritually drowsy or if we are distracted by self-centered pursuits, we may not even hear him knocking at the door of our hearts. We won't be ready for him, now or later, when he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.