

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent B  
All Saints Church, Syracuse, NY

December 2 & 3, 2017  
Rev. Frederick D. Daley

### STAY ALERT

I had a nice visit with Fr. Andy last week on the phone: He sends his love and thank yous for his birthday cards etc. He shared with me a funny story about his early days of transition to Murray – Weigel Hall at Fordham.

One afternoon he was doing some reading and was distracted by the blaring music coming from a bar across the street, and was annoyed. He went to another room on the other side of the building, only to be exposed to the roar of airplanes taking off and landing from the nearby LaGuardia Airport. Finally, he went to go to the chapel on the third side of the building and within a minute, the chapel's silence was replaced by the screeching of leaf blowers as the grounds crew passed by the chapel window. At that point, in complete frustration, he complained to God – shaking his cane in the air (It's hard to picture Fr. Andy doing that, but we all have our moments). After a few moments, God responded: “Andy – get some ear plugs!” Andy went on to say – three months later – “If someone were to ask me about the noise at Fordham, I would say ‘What noise?’ – not because of the ear plugs, but because I am now adjusted to my new environment.”

As I reflected on Fr. Andy's story, it said something to me about Advent. It's so easy for me to get caught up in the whirlwind of the moment – the stress, the anxiety, the fears and pressures of the moment – the stuff of my everyday life, sort of living on the surface. As our reading from Mark reminds us: Advent is a time to wake up – be aware – pay attention to the promise of God in our midst.

The spiritual writer Richard Rohr, writes that faith and spirituality begin with “seeing.” It's not about earning or achieving but about “paying attention” – Paying attention to the presence of God in every joy and sorrow, in every pain and trauma, in every victory and setback before us.

Sisters and brothers, in order to do that, we need to get below the surface of things, to go a bit deeper, and that's what Advent is all about.

Another story: one I've told before, but it makes a point. Margaret is set up on a blind date with a young pediatrician. He comes across as nerdy and awkward, he's painfully shy, he stumbles through their simple conversation, he spills soup on his tie during dinner. Margaret is contemplating faking a headache and asking to be taken home early when the doctor's phone goes off. He's called to an emergency and invites her to come along, since it's on the way to her home. Seeing him interact with the sick child, she discovers a tenderness in him that surprises her and she begins to speculate about what sort of husband and father he might be. "If he isn't the man of my dreams," she wonders to herself, "maybe it's time for me to change those dreams." Again, going deeper, getting under the surface.

Advent is a time for us to focus our vision on the treasure of life, rather than the trappings of lifestyle and the surface of things. In the wisdom of our liturgical church year, with Advent we begin again: a little retreat to celebrate the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us 2000 years ago and on to the second coming of Christ at the end of time. But most relevant to us gathered here today: a time to prepare for the rebirth of Jesus, within us and among us. It's really a challenge to get beneath all the hectic-ness and busy-ness of the season, all the stuff we need to do to get ready for the holidays.

As Delia Smith, a spiritual writer from London recalls: "It was about 11:30pm on Christmas Eve when I arrived at my local church to celebrate the first mass of Christmas at midnight as usual. But as I sat there I simply had to fess up to the fact that my tired, aching body was in no fit state to celebrate anything. How sad that to celebrate the second greatest feast in the Christian calendar I had become so ensnared in what the world makes of Christmas that I was miserable, not joyful. I had done my worldly best: wrapping presents, mailing cards, preparing food, not a thing missed! But at that moment of self-revelation, I realized that I was simply too exhausted to celebrate this - the greatest birth in the history of all humanity."

Here are some practical suggestions:

1. Spending 10 minutes each day with a candle, using daily advent reflections or centering prayer.
2. Attending daily mass, and enjoying the Advent readings
3. Taking contemplative walks
4. At 4:00 this afternoon, Deirdre Connell, the author of Jesus was a Migrant, will speak
5. Other Advent and Winter Solstice events
6. Reflect on the “stuff” of our lives, and contemplate how we spend our money
7. Talk as a family about how we can rebirth Jesus in our lives

Be alert – Be watchful –

What I say to you, I say to all: Watch!

Come Lord Jesus!

Amen.