

REFLECTION

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Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. (Mark 13:33-37)

In this week's Gospel, we hear Jesus encouraging us to "Be watchful! Be alert!" in waiting for the coming of the Reign of God. Jesus uses the image of a homeowner who first secures his home and belongings before leaving to take a trip. Because his travels take him far from his property, the homeowner is intentional about ensuring that his own property is in order before setting out for a new road and destination. We might imagine the factors that would drive his painstakingly detailed preparations: extra security to protect his home from thieves, people to check on the resources of the house to make sure that it doesn't flood or become too drafty without anyone inhabiting it, and perhaps also to achieve a sense of his own inner peace, that he has taken an active role in protecting his property.

Jesus' parable reminds us of the importance of securing our own "inner" home and taking an active role in preparing ourselves for our own journeys in life. For me, this parable brings to mind the importance of engaging in our own formation. During my time as an apprentice catechetical leader as part of the University of Notre Dame's Echo Faith Formation Leadership Program, I was introduced to the hard work of formation. Formation is the intentional cultivation of our spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral qualities as human beings that allows us to live out our call to holiness in a generous and healthy way in ministry. In Echo, I entered the world of professional ministry for the first time. I learned quickly that ministry calls us to give deeply of ourselves; however, in being new to ministry, I neglected to secure my own "inner home" of my mind, heart, body, and soul before journeying out of myself to encounter others in the work of evangelization and catechesis. I was susceptible to the outside thieves of comparison, results-driven ministry, and how I could best show off my training and theological knowledge to those I served. In order to make an offering of my own life in ministry that truly served the coming of the reign of God and did not depend on my own efforts or ego, I had to learn to engage my own formation. I intentionally cultivated a life of prayer, took care in applying my studies in catechesis and ministry to my work, and reflected and healed through a relationship with a therapist. Over time, I felt revitalized and more able to cooperate with the Spirit's work in my life and ministry because I was no longer focused on just trying to survive.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

In the Christian life, we are called to accompany others in the life of faith. A relationship of accompaniment is a perfect setting for formation; it allows us to lean on and learn from each other how best to imitate Jesus in our life. Is there someone in your own life, especially in difficult circumstances, who you might intentionally accompany this Advent? How can you help them secure their own "inner" house on the journey of faith through walking with them in solidarity, mutuality, and listening?

Focus: SPIRITUALITY

By failing at trying to minister based on my own efforts to be the most knowledgeable and most available to those I served, I learned that with the help of the Holy Spirit, I had to engage my own formation so I could be awake, alert, and ready to make of myself a healthy and holy offering. Through formation, I grew to become a minister with her house in order while being on the journey of faith and ministry, prepared to meet Jesus in those I served "whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning." How can you aim to put your own inner house in order this Advent? Are there spaces in your life where you can engage in your own formation in order to make a more generous and healthy offering of your life?

PRAYER

God, Isaiah speaks out "Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands." We remember that our lives are the spaces where our salvation unfolds, where we are formed and shaped into art by you, the Artist of Artists. Send your Spirit upon us to be moved by those you place in our path so we may be formed in compassion, empathy, and solidarity. Strengthen us to take an active role in shaping our world to be a reflection of your infinite love through the witness of our lives. Amen.

