

REFLECTION

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"At an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come..." - Matthew 24:37-44

Today's Gospel reading launches us into Advent, with Jesus imploring his disciples to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man. The disciples are told to "Stay awake!" and are advised to prepare in the way Noah prepared for the flood, and in the way that a master of the house might prepare if he knew exactly when a thief would arrive. There is something disarming and perhaps even disconcerting about Jesus' message today. How many of us are truly "staying awake"? How many of us are prepared to leave our old lives and habits behind to follow the Lord when, say, the clock strikes twelve?

To me, this Gospel provides a perfect opportunity to reflect on our relationship with time. During my volunteer year with the Augustinians, I had no idea how quickly time would pass. It seemed like only a moment between my arrival in California in August and our midyear retreat in January. The second half of the year passed almost as quickly. All the while, the Community Assistance Program where I worked challenged me to be organized so that when urgent matters arose, I would be ready to "leave behind" all my nonessential work and respond. Situations such as clients' health emergencies, family illnesses and deaths, home evictions, and mental health crises were more important than my own workday, my community life, or my own "volunteer experience." It took quite a lot of experience for me to learn these priorities, though! While the final day of my service year still snuck up on me like a thief, I like to think I will now remain just a little more "awake" than if I had never volunteered.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

This Advent, I would like to challenge you to offer direct help to a senior citizen in your community. Oftentimes, seniors spend the Advent and Christmas seasons in isolation. Seniors may also face physical challenges which may prevent them from attending events or visiting neighbors and friends. Over the next few weeks, can you offer some of your time – perhaps by visiting with a senior in their home, or by offering to transport them to a place they'd like to be?

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

In today's First Reading from Isaiah, we are granted a vision of what the coming of the Son of Man might look like: people from all nations will stream together, ascending to the house of the Lord, receiving instruction, and disperse to spread the Word and the light of God throughout the world. We are also told how "one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

In contrast to the Gospel's call for personal readiness ("Stay awake!"), this reading from Isaiah proclaims that we as nations should prepare too. As we read daily about the conflict and oppression happening in communities around the world, I find great hope in Isaiah's words. God comforts his people. I pray that we the American people, and our leaders, might renew our multifaceted efforts towards peace for all communities, abroad and at home.

PRAYER

God, you have given us this Advent season and we are thankful. We offer ourselves and everything we do to you. In the days ahead, help us to show to each other kindness, patience, gentleness, and above all love – which keep us together.

This we ask through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

