

St. Sebastian, Milwaukee

Cycle B First Sunday of Advent – November 29, 2020

Scriptures and links offered by Mike Kamenski

Reflections

1. MUSIC

“E’en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come” by Paul Manz

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjtMJxt000I>

Music Notes:

Oh my!!! This is one of my most favorite Advent anthems. Our St. Sebastian Choir has sung this several times. Happy Advent to all! This recording of the piece is AMAZING!

2. SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

“Staying Awake”

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser

In his autobiography, *Report to Greco*, Nikos Kazantzakis recounts a conversation he once had with an old monk. Kazantzakis, a young man at the time, was visiting a monastery and was very taken by a famed ascetic, Father Makarios, who lived there. But a series of visits with the old monk left him with some ambivalent feelings as well. The monk’s austere lifestyle stirred a certain religious romanticism in Kazantzakis, but it repelled him too; he wanted the romanticism, but in a more-palatable way. Here’s their conversation as Kazantzakis records it:

“Yours is a hard life, Father. I too want to be saved. Is there no other way?”

“More agreeable?” asked the ascetic, smiling compassionately.

“More human, Father.”

“One, only one.”

“What is that?”

“Ascent. To climb a series of steps. From the full stomach to hunger, from the slaked throat to thirst, from joy to suffering. God sits at the summit of hunger, thirst, and suffering; the devil sits at the summit of the comfortable life. Choose.”

“I am still young. The world is nice. I have time to choose.”

Reaching out, the old monk touched my knee and said:

“Wake up, my child. Wake up before death wakes you up.”

I shuddered and said:

“I am still young.”

“Death loves the young,” the old man replied. “The inferno loves the young. Life is like a lighted candle, easily extinguished. Take care—wake up!”

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Wake up! Wake up before death wakes you up. In a less dramatic expression that's a virtual leitmotif in the Gospels. Jesus is always telling us to wake up, to stay awake, to be vigilant, to be more alert to a deeper reality. What's meant by that? How are we asleep to depth? How are we to wake up and stay awake?

How are we asleep? All of us know how difficult it is for us to be inside the present moment, to not be asleep to the real riches inside our own lives. The distractions and worries of daily life tend to so consume us that we habitually take for granted what's most precious to us, our health, the miracle of our senses, the love and friendships that surround us, and the gift of life itself. We go through our daily lives not only with a lack of reflectiveness and lack of gratitude but with a habitual touch of resentment as well, a chronic, grey depression, Robert Moore calls it. We are very much asleep, both to God and to our own lives.

How do we wake up? Today there's a rich literature that offers us all kinds of advice on how to get into the present moment so as to be awake to the deep riches inside our own lives. While much of this literature is good, little of it is very effective. It invites us to live each day of our lives as if it was our last day, but we simply can't do that. It's impossible to sustain that kind of intentionality and awareness over a long period of time. An awareness of our mortality does wake us up, as does a stroke, a heart attack, or cancer; but that heightened-awareness is easier to sustain for a short season of our lives than it is for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years. Nobody can sustain that kind of awareness all the time. None of us can live seventy or eighty years as if each day was his or her last day. Or can we?

Spiritual wisdom offers a nuanced answer here: We can and we can't! On the one hand, the distractions, cares, and pressures of everyday life will invariably have their way with us and we will, in effect, fall asleep to what's deeper and more important inside of life. But it's for this reason that every major spiritual tradition has daily rituals designed precisely to wake us from spiritual sleep, akin to an alarm clock waking us from physical sleep.

It's for this reason we need to begin each day with prayer. What happens if we don't pray on a given morning is not that we incur God's wrath, but rather that we tend to miss the morning, spending the hours until noon trapped inside a certain dullness of heart. The

same can be said about praying before meals. We don't displease God by not first centering ourselves in gratitude before eating, but we miss out on the richness of what we're doing. Liturgical prayer and the Eucharist have the same intent, among their other intentions. They're meant to, regularly, call us out of a certain sleep.

None of us lives each day of our lives as if it was his or her last day. Our heartaches, headaches, distractions, and busyness invariably lull us to sleep. That's forgivable; it's what it means to be human. So we should ensure that we have regular spiritual rituals, spiritual alarm clocks, to jolt us back awake—so that it doesn't take a heart attack, a stroke, cancer, or death to wake us up.

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