

November 30, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

'Our Lord Jesus said "And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

I have heard that if you live to be seventy years old, and boy...is that old...by that age you will have spent three years of your life just waiting.....

We have waited in line at the grocery store, waited in the doctor's office, much more often as the years have grown. For some husbands or partners.....waiting for lunch to be ready, waiting for recess time at school and college all those years ago.

On this first Sunday in Advent I am going to start out my homily with the same verses as being told to our fledgling Sunday School.

In his book, "Oh, the Places You'll Go," Dr. Seuss talks about a place called "the waiting place." He describes it as a useless place where people are just waiting, waiting, waiting !!.

Waiting for a train to go  
or a bus to come, or a plane to go  
or the mail to come, or the rain to go  
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow  
or waiting around for a Yes or No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.  
Everyone is just waiting.

Last Friday morning, the alarm clock went off just like any other morning but instead of turning it off, Becky and Tom leaped out of bed and rushed to the bathroom. Tom quickly shaved and Becky hastily put on her make-up. Their movements were quick, intentional, and efficient. Their usually sluggish morning routine had turned into an Indy style pit stop. They were awake and alert because they were on a mission. It was of course, the day after Thanksgiving otherwise known as Black Friday and they were headed to the mall to participate in the annual shopping spree to inaugurate the holiday season.

Shoppers across America not only woke up early on Friday morning but many of them had been standing in line since early on Thanksgiving day itself in hopes of

finding bargains by the cart-full. Computers and other electronic gadgetry were in big demand and marketing executives made sure that per usual their store had plenty of enticing lures throughout the departments. This required some shoppers to develop intricate strategies to maximize their shopping time. Another couple Tara and Bobby had it all planned out before they joined the waiting throng about 10pm on Thursday. Bobby was assigned the purchase of an Insignia DVD player and Becky the heavily marked down home computer system.

I wonder if Becky and Tom sprang out of bed this morning with the same enthusiasm and intentionality that propelled them to the mall on Black Friday. Or, did Tara and Bobby wait all night at the front door of Trinity church, in order, to reserve a pew up front, close to the pulpit.

It is so very interesting that when we have the proper motivation, we will do extraordinary things. Our bodies pump adrenalin through our muscles driving out even the faint touches of dreariness. We will rush from store to store after having gotten only a few hours sleep but on most Sunday mornings after a good night's sleep, we barely have enough staying power to keep awake through the Scripture Readings, let alone the homily

I have calculated that I have attended thirty two Diocesan Conventions, missing only one since 1981, and that was in 2010 because of being hospitalized.

I will share a secret with you, but please don't tell the Bishop, I find the event particularly tedious and can't wait until it is over. But this year there was a difference.

Some thirty years ago, when our kids were still very young, two young gay males lived next door to us in Western Springs. In those days, I had extremely different political and social views. I was so conservative I approached being reactionary. While it is inappropriate to discuss politics from this place, let us say I have changed somewhat on a number of issues.

I did my very best to shield our kids from the "influence "of our neighbors and fortunately we had an 8 foot fence dividing the properties. I was just waiting till the guys moved away.

The writer of Mark's Gospel inserts this morning's Scripture passage at the end of a rather lengthy teaching session. A disciple comments about the beauty of the Temple and Jesus uses the remark to remind his band of followers of the

coming judgment of God against that house of worship. Stunned by his words, the disciples want to know [dates and places](#). [They want a](#) timeline

Jesus provides his disciples with a rather vivid and detailed description of those events. He speaks about the coming siege and destruction of Jerusalem. He is telling them of the pending terror so that when they notice the first signs of the pending doom they will respond immediately. A crisis is coming and they must be ready.

He also warns his disciples that they will be persecuted for their faith. Jesus never attempts to sugar-coat the life of discipleship. They chose the hard way. They will not be able to later say that they had not been warned.

All those years ago, a close friend from Wales was staying with the Dolans, John and Nigel decided to go downtown for lunch. It had been snowing pretty heavily and there were large snow piles in the street outside our house. Eight hours later we arrived home, transported by limo with both of us, well let me put it this way, not in the best of condition.

I fell out of the limo and just lay waiting in the snow pile. There was no sign of Nigel.

I was just waiting...feeling bad....feeling cold....just waiting.

Then I sensed someone standing next to me, and an outstretched hand helping me up out of the snow pile. It was Ross one of our two neighbors that I had taught our kids to avoid. "Here let me help you John", he said . He then allowed me to lean on his arm and took me into his house. Ross said, "Let me help you clean up a little and then help you in to see Karen, I am sure she is worried about you."

This was one of those turning points in your life, my whole attitude changed dramatically as a result of Ross reaching out to me..... the massive strength of an act of human kindness.

A few months later in 1989, our two neighbors moved away to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

By his admonition, Jesus indicates that he wants his disciples to be more than just mentally and physically awake. He wants them to be spiritually awake so that they will understand the reality that is exploding around them. He knows that they

cannot control it. They do not have any influence upon it but he wants them to understand the theological meaning of the events that are about to transpire.

In his opening line of an autobiographic essay, a college freshman once wrote:

"Last year, I awoke from a coma that had lasted for 18 years. The coma was called 'my life.'" The young man then described how a particularly gifted teacher had awakened him to a new reality. The teacher got into his face, grabbed him by the neck, shook him up and down, and made him take, for the first time in his life, an honest look at his life. That college freshman discovered that we can be physically awake but mentally asleep.

My attitude to our gay neighbors amongst many other attitudes at that time in my life was an indication of my being mentally asleep to what's good and what's right in the world.

Back at the convention on Friday, I was gearing myself up for another series of exciting workshops, when I heard a vaguely familiar voice. "Do you remember me?" I looked down at the name tag "Ross Coons , delegate from St. Peters Chicago". It was indeed my neighbor from all those years ago.

Ross and his partner have been back, living in downtown Chicago for twenty years.

I related to Ross the same story I have told this morning. How his love and caring that snowy day began a change in my attitude that shifted mountains of bigotry.

Ross was overcome with emotion, tears, streaming down his face....in his words, "I have never heard anything like this ,God Bless you for telling me this story."

The words of Jesus do not warn us to keep a physical vigilance but a spiritual one. Their message does warn us to resist the weariness of the world around us....but. we are NOT to become so enmeshed in the cultural values and lifestyles of our neighbors, friends and even family that we fall asleep to the spiritual reality that is unfolding before us. His message should compel us to discover the complex truth of living in the world but not being of it.

Jesus tells us to keep watch to stay awake.

..... Amen.