

The last few years have witnessed reports of drivers of automobiles and public transit vehicles, such as buses and trains, involved in crashes with other vehicles resulting in death and serious injury. On closer examination it has been determined that at the time of the crash the operator of the vehicle was distracted through talking or texting on a cell phone, or using some other type of electronic communication device. In response individual states and the federal government have, or are contemplating, passing laws severely limiting the type of device that may be allowed (a hands free phone for example) or prohibiting the use of such devices altogether. The message is clear: distracted drivers losing focus can lead to deadly consequences for others and themselves.

As we enter into Advent once again traditionally this First Sunday is an admonition to “watch”, to not lose focus. During Advent we are not preparing for the coming of the Christ Child as a baby in Bethlehem; that already happened more than 2000 years ago. That first coming which we celebrate on Christmas has on-going relevance for us because every year we celebrate it it should point us to perceive more intensely the ways in which Emmanuel, God-with-us, is present among us today, moving us toward that vision of peace and unity (the Kingdom of God) which Isaiah so eloquently describes. The prophet dreams of how all people stream toward the city of peace, all dwell in unity, weapons of war are re-tooled for the purposes of feeding the hungry, and the pursuit of war is abandoned.

Continuing this theme, St. Paul gives concrete advice about how we might accomplish this vision. Paul exhorts us to “throw off works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” He recognizes that the peace of which Isaiah dreamed, and which the coming of Christ brought about in a new way, does not come without a struggle. It takes more than just wishing and longing to make it a reality. Both Isaiah and Paul are reminding us of what the focus of our life should consist: dedication and commitment to the work of the Reign of God here and now.

Jesus warns us about the dangers of becoming distracted. Citing the example of the people of Noah's day and of workers in various daily activities, Jesus warns us not to become so pre-occupied, so distracted, that we end up losing focus, end up missing recognizing and ministering to his presence among us now and on the day eternity dawns for us individually at death, and all of us at the end of world history.

This is a tall order. We all live, work, in a world filled with distractions: personal calendars that are too full; family demands and calendars with shuttle schedules to get children to their activities resembling the intense planning that would go into planning and executing a transportation system for a large city. And with our technological devices: cell phones, blue tooth, blackberry, i-pads and whatever else may be out there, and several, social communication networks (e-mail, Facebook, Twitter and the like) we are constantly "wired." At the end of the day we fall exhausted into bed only to get up the next morning and plod on. Human life with all its demands must be met. How, amid all these demands can we keep focus on God and God's plan and mission for us, keep from being unduly distracted, losing control, spiritually crashing?

I'd like to offer three suggestions not only for these next four weeks, but as on-going means of keeping focus and not becoming distracted.

First, find at least five minutes a day when you simply call to mind the presence of the Lord with you and rest in that presence. You may want to recited a decade of the rosary or read a short passage of Scripture. Secondly, when you do this, and especially when you come to Mass, turn off your cell phone, or for Mass, leave it locked in the car (unless of course your professional responsibilities require you to be on-call) so that you can give your attention to God. Your messages will be waiting for you when you finish. Third, do a spiritual inventory and celebrate the Sacrament of Penance during Advent. (The schedule was mailed you and it appears in the bulletin.) Implementing such practices we will not become "distracted Christians" but focused and alert ones ready to meet the Lord whenever and however he comes.