

ADVENT SUNDAY I "A"
NOVEMBER 30/DECEMBER 1, 2019

A couple of years ago as I turned a corner with my car I immediately saw a young woman approaching the street walking down the embankment from her apartment. Her gaze was intently fixed on the screen of her I-phone. Not looking up she stepped off the curb in front of me. Immediately applying the brakes and sounding the horn of my car, startled, she looked up in horror to see my car. Her inattentiveness could have been very costly, even deadly.

Both St. Paul and Jesus sound the horn of attentiveness, to focus, alerting us to the danger of becoming self-absorbed and distracted as we open another Church Year this Advent. St. Paul exhorts us it is "now the hour for you to awake from sleep" (Rm. 13:11). In his examples of the men harvesting the field and the women grinding grain, Jesus reminds us that human life can be unpredictable, its circumstances can change literally in an instant, that we need to keep focus, not become distracted, lest like the people of Noah's day pre-occupied with the things of this world they were caught unprepared the day the flood came.

These admonitions by St. Paul and Jesus are given not to frighten us, for our God is a God of love not a being of fear waiting to pounce on us in a weak or vulnerable moment. Another Advent season signals the desire of God through the gift of himself in his Son, Jesus, to enter into, or deepen, his relationship of loving friendship with us. But, as always, God will not force himself on us. We are invited to do our part through our desiring, our preparing to receive the new or renewed life offered us through living lives of focus on Jesus and the Kingdom while, as best we can, guarding ourselves from being caught up in the many distractions of our everyday lives which can dull, or even annul, divine life within us leaving us vulnerable to being caught off guard at a moment of crisis, of decision.

Such distraction and loss of focus can envelope us so subtly that we don't even know or take thought of its happening and its effects. To go back to another example I, and I suspect others here have had, with I-phone use by another person. Sometimes when visiting, instructing or counselling an individual who has brought their mobile phone to our meeting, I've experienced them picking it up while I am talking to them, focusing on the screen, scrolling

through the posts, and sometimes sending a tweet or two. I'm sure this is not done maliciously. It has become habit, done without much, or any, forethought. When I experience this, I gently, but firmly, ask the individual to turn their device off and put it away because I need their full attention to the matter at hand involving both of us.

The same temptation exists in our spiritual life. We can end up becoming, or allowing ourselves, to become distracted with the many tasks of our lives that compete for our attention and give scant, or no, attention to the voice and presence of the one who is attempting to speak to us, who loves each of us infinitely and desires our love in return. Advent is God's gentle, yet firm, invitation to look up from the one, or many things, that distract us, open or re-open space in our lives and focus or re-focus our lives on Jesus.

The way we do this is through prayer—daily prayer. The weekly parish Bulletin contains the biblical citations of the upcoming week's daily Mass and following Sunday's scripture readings. Carving out ten minutes of quiet at the beginning or end of the day to sit with God's Word renews our focus. Publications such as *The Word Among us*, *Magnificat*, and *Give Us This Day* provide good, short reflections on the daily scripture to aid our prayer. Creighton University and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on their web-sites both offer the daily scriptures and a brief (under five minutes) audio and/or a video reflection. Recitation of the Rosary, making a short visit perhaps on the way to or from work for a few minutes of quiet prayer in the Burke Chapel before the exposed Blessed Sacrament, participation in daily Mass for those who are able—are some ways to help us keep focused, ready to meet Jesus as he comes to us now as well as when he comes to call each of us to eternal union with him in his Kingdom.

A Blessed Advent to all of you!

1 December 2019
Father Jim Secora