

## DECEMBER 2, 2018

First Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 [JER 33:14-16](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14](#)

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R. (1b) To you, O Lord, I lift my soul.

Reading 2 1 [THES 3:12—4:2](#)

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Gospel [LK 21:25-28, 34-36](#)

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Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand. “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.”

### HOMILY:

In the 1800’s as large cities began to expand and space in those cities decreased, the logical way to grow was up—taller buildings. However, the taller the buildings were, the thicker the walls needed to be, making buildings over eight or so floors impractical. A technological obstacle kept the buildings from going up—until an invention of Alphonse Halbou of the company *Forges de la Providence* in Belgium in 1849. He developed what later came to be called the I-beam, with its ability to support the extraordinary load of a high and heavy building with a very compact structure. Problem solved, right? **NOT QUITE.** For next came a physical obstacle—the unwillingness of the user of the buildings, the human person to climb many more flights of stairs than the 8-10 stories of the older brick buildings. The next invention was the elevator, so that the person destined for the higher floors could ride in comfort to the top, rather than trudge up flight after flight of stairs. Problem solved, right? **NOT QUITE.** For the obstacle to progress now became a psychological one—the psychology of fear! For, what if these convenient elevators broke loose and crashed to the earth? Out of fear, no one would get in them!

Then came the final pivotal figure in the development of the modern skyscraper—the 19<sup>th</sup> century figure of **Elisha Otis**—a New Yorker who had patented the elevator break, insuring that if an elevator cable broke, the car would be stopped in its fall. Yet folks were skeptical. No orders came to Otis until the 1853 New York World’s Fair offered a great chance at publicity. At the New York Crystal Palace, Otis amazed a crowd when he ordered the only rope holding the platform on which he was standing cut. The rope was severed by an axeman, and the platform fell only a few inches before coming to a halt. The safety locking mechanism he had invented had worked, and people gained greater willingness to ride in elevators; these elevators quickly became trusted and popular and helped make present-day skyscrapers possible.

Fear is powerful—and as the history of the elevator shows, it can keep us from progress. It can keep us from living fully. So... as we look around our lives, our world, our community, how powerful is the life-strangling presence of fear? Last year, Chapman University conducted a poll about what Americans are either *afraid of* or *very afraid of*. While it is conventional wisdom that public speaking, like I am doing now, and dying are the most prominent fears in people, it seems

like politics and public policy are where we harbor our greatest fears these days, no doubt in the wake the seismic political events of the 2016 Presidential election. The top five fears reported to Chapman University in its annual poll:

- 1. Corrupt Government Officials
- 2. Changing of Healthcare Legislation
- 3. Pollution of Oceans, Rivers and Lakes
- 4. Unclean Drinking Water
- 5. Not Having Enough Money for the Future.

Incidentally, way down at #50 is the fear of dying, while #52 is the fear of public speaking. Apparently, what I'm doing at this moment is now a "piece of cake." What are the fears that you bring with you today? Is it these political and public policy items? Or is the fear of sickness, the possibility of a loved one dying, or something else?

The season of Advent begins this year with the readings at Mass challenging us to face our fears. Jesus himself touches the fears of the people of his day in an age of political upheaval and violence, when he says, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." After this fearsome warning of things soon to come, Jesus then offers **THE WORD** of hope when he says that directly into our fears will come "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." He then counsels his disciples, "But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."

Fear is a powerful block to progress, as the history of the elevator showed. It is also a powerful obstacle to living fully. When we have been given this precious gift of life, what a tragedy if fear robs us of that gift—even a little! There is so much vibrant living to do! And into our fears the Lord, the prince of peace, comes, asking us to rise up, lift our heads, for our redemption is at hand! He is at hand, as he always is, literally placed in our hands and placed in our hearts in the Eucharist we are about to share. What fears keep you from living? In the face of them, Jesus says, stand up, rise up to the glory of God's redemption in the Word Made Human at Bethlehem and given to us at this sacred altar. Let us bring our fears and exchange them here for His strength and His peace.