

Our gospel for today has a very simple message. We MUST live our lives with constant readiness, for the Lord's return. We must BE ready and we MUST STAY ready, because what is the alternative? Remember last week's Gospel parable where Christ told us that in the final days he would be separating the sheep from the goats. Well I don't know about you but I spent way too much of my life with the goats, and now that I'm included among the sheep, (at least I pray that I am) I'm going to do my best to stay here.

Most of us can recall opportunities we have missed in our lives. We may have regret for the times we became complacent and may have lost something important to us.

I work as an addiction counselor and one of the biggest pitfalls in recovery from addiction is complacency. Complacency is when you have thoughts like. ...You know, I got this, I don't really have to worry about my addiction any more, I can do this on my own. I don't need any help. I don't need any support. In religious language we would say—I don't have to worry about my tendency to sin

anymore. I got this. I can do this on my own, I don't need to go to Mass, I don't need prayer or sacraments any more, I don't need my Christian community.

My friends, let's not fool ourselves. We all need to stay prepared spiritually for the coming of the Lord. Be ready, stay awake, stay prepared, since no one, not the angels and not even Jesus himself knows the precise time of the coming of the Son of man. In Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:12) he is very clear when he writes that we all need to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling"—nothing is guaranteed when it comes to our eternal reward. We all need to stay awake and guard against complacency and our tendency to sin.

How do we do this? We rely on our faith and on each other to accomplish this. It's not easy being a Christian. Christianity has always been called a communitarian religion. You simply can't do it alone. We rely on each other, we rely on our sacraments which are communal in nature. Baptisms, Marriages, We have the Eucharist

and reconciliation, all sacraments that take place in the community. AND in addition, we have the communion of saints who are a part of our community—those who have gone before us in this deep and holy tradition that is our Catholic faith. We can use prayer to rely on them.

At the present time in the popular culture sin has become an idea that a politically correct person doesn't speak about— but we CAN talk about addictions in our culture.....drugs, alcohol, cyber-addictions, pornography, excess consumerism, competitiveness — those bad habits and those sensory things that keep us tied the world. Our addictions ARE our sins, they are our pride, our arrogance, our envy or our uncaring behaviors, our selfishness.

Well, again we have our sacraments, the Eucharist, confessions, and the company of other good Christians to keep us on the right path.

So let's not miss our Advent opportunity.

Let's be present for it. Our liturgical calendar provides us with Scripture readings to help us. Like today, Mark's gospel places us,

and the historical church, in a acute state of waiting, and in my opinion that is the place where each of us can be the most spiritually healthy. It's about being present, alert and awake. Are we? Maybe....maybe not....What we need, right now, is a SEASON to get ready. So we are presented with this Advent season, preparing for the coming of the Christ-child, preparing for this great Christian feast of Christmas. We need this advent season to gain a sense of preparedness, we need to solidify our spiritual health and re-declare our discipleship, to welcome again the child Jesus into our hearts and homes. Advent makes it all a little easier...It's easier, somehow, isn't it? To welcome a little innocent child into our hearts, than it is to welcome the Lord and all he asks of us as his disciples? Let's take advantage of all Advent has to offer this year, if your worship site has a faith sharing groups— take advantage of one. There will be more opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation, —take advantage of it. If you can make it to an extra Mass during the week, do it—take advantage. Get ready, stay awake, ready to welcome

Jesus into your hearts right now through this Eucharist. And through every Eucharist you receive on your journey toward Christmas.

Amen.