

HOMILY – FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT “B” 12-3-2017

Thanksgiving is behind us – although we may still have some post thanksgiving dieting to do. Black Friday, cyber Monday and incessant holiday commercials still plague us. Our time and energy is focused on preparations for family gatherings, for special meals, for shopping and gifts, and for holiday decorating. The danger in all of this feverish activity is that we might miss what is truly important.

A young naval officer was working his way up the chain of command. One day he was particularly pleased when the captain announced that the next morning the young officer would be in charge of launching the boat from port. This was a considerable responsibility, and the young officer wanted to do well. So the next morning he gave a number of rapid commands and the decks were buzzing with activity. Soon the boat was making its way out of port. The officer was pleased with himself and was quite sure that he had set a record for the most rapid departure from port. He was therefore not surprised when a seaman came up to him with a note of congratulations from the captain. He was, however, perplexed that the captain's note was a radio message. It read: "Congratulations on your rapid departure from port. But in your speed you forgot one important rule: Make sure the captain is on board before you get underway."

One way we could read the Gospel today is to hear Jesus telling us to stay awake, to stay awake to life, to stay awake to what really matters. All this holiday activity and preparation can get in the way of our seeing what is of true value. The ultimate goal of these weeks before Christmas should be to recognize the spiritual and personal dimension of all that we do.

We must make every attempt to avoid leaving the captain behind. What is the value of spending hours of preparation to call family and friends together, if the activity of that preparation prevents us from appreciating the people we gather? What advantage is it to find the perfect gift for every person, if the activity of finding that gift makes us irritable or impatient with the people we love? What is the ultimate importance of checking off everything from our holiday list, if such activity blinds us to the moment of grace that God will place in our life? How can we be fully present to others if we are constantly checking mobile devices and texting?

Although we speak of Advent as the waiting for Christ's birth or his return in eternal glory, the reality is that Christ is with us, and Christ does plan to bless us in the upcoming weeks, with tenderness, reconciliation, and joy. But the success of the holiday will depend on our ability to recognize those moments and to take them in.

How can we do this? There is a beautiful creation story told by Cherokee Indians that might help us. The story says that on the day after creation was complete God asked all

the plants of creation to stay awake for seven days in celebration of the earth. With each passing day more and more of the plants grew tired and fell asleep. On the seventh day only two plants were still awake: the pine tree and the holly bush. So God blessed them and said to them: "Because you stayed awake, you will remain green forever. In the heart of winter you will remain sentinels of life." So to this day the Cherokee Indians say that winter comes, all the other plants lose their leaves and fall asleep. But the pine and holly bush stay awake.

Maybe in the coming weeks of Advent when we notice a pine tree or a holly bush standing green against the barren trees and the snow, maybe that tree and bush will remind us to stay awake to the things that really matter. After all, the upcoming weeks are not about our tasks but about our relationships, about the people in our lives. The upcoming weeks are not about what we will do, but what Christ will do for us. Christ will indeed bless us with moments of grace. Those moments are what we must not miss. It is for those moments that we must stay awake.

It should come as no surprise to us that the success of this season, as of every season, is the presence of Christ with us. Therefore, as this Advent season begins, be sure that Christ is on board before we get underway.

Closing Story 12-3-17

There were three women that arrived at the Pearly Gates and St. Peter greeted them warmly and then he said, "Excuse me, but I have some pressing issues that I need to attend to and then I will come back and process you through." Well, quite a bit of time went by and finally St. Peter returned and he went to the first woman and he said, "I hope you didn't mind waiting...I apologize for keeping you waiting." "Oh no, not a problem," she said, "I have been waiting all my life to get here." "Good," said St. Peter. "Now I only have one question for you," he said. "How do you spell God?" "Capital, G...O...D," she says. "Good, come on in." Well he went to second woman and he asked her the same question, "Are you o.k. with having to wait so long?" And she said, "Oh", she said, "Look, I have been waiting 56 years, a couple more minutes makes no difference; I'm just glad to be here." And Peter said, "Oh, that's awesome. Good, well, I have just one question for you. How do you spell God?" "G...O...D." "Come on in, you're welcome." Well, he went up to the third woman and he said, "How was it waiting...was it hard on you? Did you mind waiting?" And she said, "I certainly did. I had to stand in line all my life on Earth, at the Super Market for cash out, at school, getting my children registered, waiting for somebody to answer on a phone call, waiting at the movie for tickets; and then I come to Heaven, and what happens? I have to wait. I 'm really teed off, St. Peter." So Peter replied, "I quite understand. Now you only have to

answer one question. How do you spell Czechoslovakia?"