

## Stay Awake, Stand Ready.

The notion that our faith has about it a quality of *urgency* or a sense of *immediacy*, is one that we have allowed somewhat to slip away from our consciousness. As a result the sense of newness, and vibrancy which our faith should instil in us has similarly been allowed to slumber, fade and grow faint. Today's gospel, coming at the beginning of the Season of Advent, offers a sharp reminder that we should be ever alert to the dangers of letting our faith take a back seat.

So as to get a proper sense of the urgency of our faith one only has to open the pages of Mark's gospel. Reading those opening chapters of the narrative gives you a real flavour of how it must have been. Jesus, beginning his ministry with words which themselves transmit this mood - *the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News* – is always on the move, and the events and action begin to spill over and on top of themselves, pressing ever onwards, careering along at great pace, carried forward in the narrative by Mark's favourite phrase *and immediately*. It is this feeling of immediacy which I think we have in a way lost. We've become accustomed to and comfortable with our situations and we no longer feel the jaggedness of our faith giving us a sharp dig in the ribs. Of course our faith still speaks to us, but now the words are applied to a lifestyle which can accommodate all that urgency and vibrancy in a rather intellectual way, distilling out of it all the real zeal which once made our hearts burn within us. We are in danger of becoming sleeping Christians, whose faith has for whatever reason taken to dozing off for most of the time. Heaven forbid that we become comatose, because we can't afford to.

We often bemoan the state of things, reminiscing how in days past it was never like this but we forget that we have allowed it all to happen. The fact that our communities are struggling, our hospitals failing, and our economy dysfunctional is testament to that. How is it that some bankers can act with out any moral compunction or some nurses without any feeling of compassion? How is it that some of our communities are rife with suspicion and xenophobia? Even as I write a well known politician was on the radio extolling the virtues of greed and envy. Well may we ask how has it all come to pass?

Once a society begins to lose its memory and takes no steps to retain it, that society quickly begins to forget its origins. No longer are these memories living templates that teach and inform, rather they become fossilised ideals, buried in a past that fails to resonate any more. It then begins to lose its sense of place or belonging and it becomes anchorless and adrift finding instead that what matters most is not what kept its soul alive or what united it, but rather telling itself that what is best for the individual is the only way to survive. We need to be awake to this inherent danger because it is happening and it is happening quickly. Advent is upon us and we will be beset with calendars and cards that offer us treats of chocolate and images of cuddly bears and rabbits rather than the story of a young mother to be, carrying in her womb the Word of life. We need to stay wake and recover our sense of urgency.

The words "stay awake" are from the Greek *gregoreite*. It went over into Latin as *greges* meaning "flock". The name Gregory means "one who stays awake and cares for the flock". As we begin Advent, let's make sure that we are ready and resolved to enable and help our families and friends to *stay awake*.