

11/30/14 1 Advent B

-- Earlier this week, I went out to a local restaurant to get some dinner. I was alone. As I was at my booth, I noticed two different couples sitting at two other booths.

-- Both of the couples were staring down at their smartphones, looking constantly on them. They barely talked to each other, except once in a while to remark about something on their phones.

-- Today, as we begin Advent, we are asked to be attentive, to watch. But we are not asked to watch our smartphones or computer screens. The watchfulness we seek is not for the latest Black Friday deals (I understand many are still going on even though Black Friday has come and gone).

-- We are asked to be attentive to the Lord's coming. And this is not primarily to watch the skies or world events for signs and catastrophes that hint at the end of the world. Nor is it principally preparation for our own death, though there's a sense in which we should always be ready for that eventuality.

-- This is primarily a call to see the Lord's presence in the world around us. It is the challenge to be awake to how God shows himself in the people in our lives, especially those with special needs. As our gospel told us last Sunday, the Lord is present in the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and imprisoned—the least among us.

-- And it's also a season to see how God speaks to us every day. It is a time to turn to the Lord in the spirit of the psalmist who says *Lord, make us turn to you. Let us see your face, and we shall be saved.*

-- The people of Israel turned to the Lord when they realized they had wandered from God's ways. The first reading comes from a people returning from exile. They knew they had been unfaithful to God, and they knew they had to turn back to him.

-- Advent is a time to take stock of how we have strayed from God's ways. What have we put ahead of seeking the Lord in our lives? What things have we spent more time seeking than the things of God?

-- To do that, we have to allow ourselves time and space to be attentive to the Lord. And that's a real challenge in our typical lifestyles. So much stuff competes for our immediate attention.

-- Perhaps we could intentionally take time away from the typical technologies we rely on so much. Let's silence our smartphones for a period of time. Turn off the radio and other devices in the car for a few minutes to take quiet time with God.

-- At home, it might be a good practice to take a minute before dinner for each person at the table to mention one blessing they received that day. (Of course, that means having at least one or two meals a week together!)

-- Maybe we could make an effort to get to Mass 5-10 minutes early in order to spend a few minutes reading one or more of the readings ahead of time. And we may want to make a commitment to receive the sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) during the season.

-- Jesus calls us to "Watch" during Advent. But that doesn't come automatically. It takes an intentional commitment—a commitment to be attentive to God's presence in our lives.