

## 11/27/16 ..... 1 Advent A

-- When my mom died, our family had plenty of warning. She had cancer, and we knew it was terminal. All six of her children were able to make it to the hospital before she died.

-- My dad's death was quite different. Yes, he was a diabetic and had open heart surgery eight years before. But he played golf on Thursday instead of his usual Friday game since he was travelling the next day.

-- He never got up Friday morning; he died in his sleep. The Lord literally came like a thief in the night. And, though my mom knew what he died from, given his history, it was no less of a shock for her and all of us.

-- In the gospel, the Lord is compared to a thief in the night. Not a pleasant image for most of us. Almost sounds like he's playing *Gotcha!* But the point is not to make God into some sneaky man trying to catch us doing something wrong.

-- After all, everything we have—including life itself—is a free gift from God. As Job said, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Life can be uncertain.

-- And that uncertainty isn't just about the time when God will call us to himself. It applies to so many things in life. People come in and out of our lives. We may come upon a person who has a need we can help with, and that moment may be our only opportunity to do that. How will we respond?

-- Perhaps there is someone in our family, or a neighbor, who has hurt us, and we no longer talk to that person. This may be a time when we can make a move toward reconciling with her. And that opportunity may well be "for a limited time only." What action will we take?

-- St. Paul tells us today that now is the hour to wake from sleep. Perhaps one of our bad habits has put us in a state of mental or moral paralysis. We can't seem to change, and maybe we don't really want to.

-- This season of Advent offers us the opportunity to stir up in our hearts a desire to change those things that keep us from being the people the Lord wants us to be.

-- It may be a good time to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to admit what is wrong and sinful in us. We can receive the grace to move on, knowing we are forgiven and have God's strength to make some changes. If we keep putting it off it becomes harder and harder.

-- For me, this season of Advent begins as this past week I received the results of my sixth year evaluation of my ministry here at St. Caspar's. It has brought both my strengths and weaknesses into clearer focus, and there are plenty of both.

-- My hope, with God's grace and the help of my spiritual director, is to use this to take a couple of concrete steps to address some of the issues I need to address. I ask God's help and your prayers in this effort.

-- And I hope and pray that you will use this time of Advent to address one or two issues in your life that need God's healing. I will assure you of my prayers as you make that effort.

-- This year, the Advent season is at its maximum length of four full weeks. But that is still a limited time. Each year the time of our salvation draws nearer and nearer. Yet that salvation must be freely received, and we can only do that if we are prepared.

-- We cannot procrastinate any longer. The time is at hand. Let's call upon the Lord for his strength to let go of those things that keep us from experiencing the full measure of his love and grace.