

## **Advent 1A**

The theme of watchfulness is often referred to in the scriptures. The watchman is the one who foregoes his sleep and keeps guard so as to prevent enemies invading under cover of darkness.

Alertness and vigilance or prayerful listening, call them what you like, are particularly associated with Advent. Today Jesus says: 'Be on your guard and stay awake, you do not know the day or the hour when the Master will return'.

Even in the secular world our lack of watchfulness or vigilance can have disastrous consequences. For instance this week in the news we heard about that heart-rending story of little five year old Logan whose life was cut short at the hands of his parents. Part of the blame was attributed to the hospital and social services who because of lack of alertness failed to notice the obvious signs of abuse on his little body.

Similarly in the spiritual zone if we are not watchful or alert, we can be lulled into a kind of spiritual complacency which presents the ideal conditions for a subtle assault of the enemy. Our enemy will be delighted to entice us into a settled cosy routine of worship and even prayer which has little or no bearing on how we live our lives in the world. Also, when we are spiritually in slumber-land we are unable to hear the voice of the Lord who calls us into a deeper friendship with Himself so that our spiritual compass may stay pointed in the right direction.

The secular run up to Christmas which coincides with Advent is often a time when our antennae for the material can be more sensitively attuned than our antennae for the spiritual. It's so easy to get caught up in a frantic merry go round of shopping, cooking, parties and presents. In this frame of mind perhaps we're more on the lookout for bargains and special offers that

on the lookout for what God is offering us in Christ. Our spiritual senses can be dulled to such an extent that we can so easily be taken unawares and succumb to the temptation of making Christmas more a mid-winter festival than a celebration of God becoming man in Jesus for our salvation.

In the introduction to her book 'a feast for Advent', Delia Smith, well known for her cookery programmes, wrote the following.

*It was about 11.30 on Christmas Eve a few years ago. I had arrived at my local church to celebrate Midnight Mass. But as I sat there I simply had to face up to the fact that my tired, aching body was in no fit state to celebrate anything. How incongruous that in order to celebrate the second greatest Feast in the Christian calendar I had become so ensnared in the trappings of what the world makes of Christmas that I was miserable - not at all joyful. But at that moment of self-revelation I realised I was simply too exhausted to celebrate this, the greatest birth in the history of mankind. It was a wake-up call for me. If we can identify with even some of what she said it can lead to a new self-awakening for us as well.*