

Advent 1C

In the market place of the old German town of Trier, two churches stand side by side. Beneath the belfry of one are the words: "watch and pray" and the scripture verse is completed on the other, "for you know neither the day nor the hour". As the clock chimes out each passing hour, the people in the busy street below are reminded that time is of the essence and is meant to be used wisely in this world as we prepare for the next.

Today, on the first Sunday, the call goes out to the whole people of God - not a gentle coaxing appeal but a loud, dramatic exhortation. It is a wake up call to watch and pray for we don't know the hour when the Lord will come knocking on our door. Because of this, we should be forever vigilant.

What does it say in the Gospel today? "Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery, drunkenness and cares of life"

Looking up the Oxford dictionary today I discovered that the word 'coarsened' means **'not delicate in perception'**. Our heart may be far from coarsened by debauchery or drunkenness, *but what about the cares and worries and trivialities of life*. Could these have blurred our perception of spiritual realities and made us less than vigilant. The answer, according to today's Gospel, is a resounding 'yes'.

In order to become more spiritually perceptive, *I need to step back at times from life's treadmill and be still - not just to slow down my body but especially my mind*. "Watch and pray" the Gospel tells us. That is not easy especially in the run-up to Christmas. If you're motivated enough, you can and will find time to be alone with God each day this Advent. To help you do this we will be leaving the Church open (car park door only) from 9am every day during Advent this year.

We could easily absolve ourselves in the lead up to Christmas by saying that all this extended activity is for the sake of the family and let ourselves off the hook. But wouldn't it be a far better example to the family if they see us giving time to God as we prepare for Christmas. As a resource for prayer this Advent we could use our advent readings from the free 'day by day' booklets which are available at the back.

How significant it is that at Christmas we find ourselves so easily caught up in twice our normal workload, so that we have no time to listen to Christ's saving message. It's only when we learn to be still and listen that we begin to find him, and understand that union with Him is the very purpose of our existence. As the Bible says: 'In God alone is my soul at rest'