

St Pius & St Anthony 1st Sunday Advent 2025 (C)

Those are some words: dismay, perplexity, fright, shaking! What gives? It's about the end of it all; the Son of Man coming. Jesus is talking about signs marking the 'end of the world as we know it'. Similar to what He said just two weeks ago (in case you felt DeJa'Vu hearing today's gospel, you'd be right!), two weeks ago we heard Mark's parallel passage describing this end-game, but today we hear Luke giving us his version of end-signs. Jesus' message is similar today about such ominous signs. Don't panic and run about. Two weeks ago, Jesus said 'no one knows the day or hour' (Mark 13:32), and this week he advises, 'Stand straight with head up' (Luke 21:28) and to 'beware' and 'be vigilant' (Luke 21:34,36). Vigilance is an all-around solution - *if you think the end is close then it's all the better – as that motivates us to do what needs doing- I suggest that any spiritual preparation for the END is never wasted*. Yet this week, a new element Jesus introduces in Luke (not found in Mark) is that Jesus adds that we should 'pray' (Lk 21:36). Can't go wrong with that. And I'd simply add that we ought to 'pray with one eye opened'. Always watching and looking for God. When Jesus talks about "that day catch you by surprise, like a trap" (Luke 21:34-35) and "pray for strength to escape" (Luke 21:36), I hear Him telling us to be vigilant and be praying with one eye open, watching for Him. Look out and look around.

I've been 'trap-surprised' before. Now, in telling this story, I need to say up front, I confess, I am a dog-person – nothing against cats, St Francis loves them, God made them, they mean a lot and do a lot for many people, but cats and I, just don't walk in the same lane. Maybe this is why? When I was in high school, I was visiting a friend Noel once. When I had come in his door, he had said something about the house cat. Basically, leave it alone, and I did mostly, but his words rang with a sense of taunt, so as I passed by it, I 'hissed' at it. Done. So later, we are just sitting at the foot of his bed on ground playing video game (the classic Atari 2600-Pitfall maybe or Frogger), and some intuitive sense raised in me, and when I looked back over my shoulder, sure enough, that Siamese cat was slinking across the bed like a ninja, come to attack the back of my head! What! Never again would I trust a cat, or turn my back to one. (of course, he said, "I told you-don't mess with her")

So, I am on team dog. Though I know, when I bring that up, an equal number of other people are nervous and afraid. Not just once, have I heard stories from mailmen, mailwomen, about dogs appearing out of nowhere (bushes, porch coves) to ambush them (in my family's grocery growing up, the mail carriers would take their morning breaks from their route, in our store – and

talk – I'd spot in a second their mace can in special pocket pouch on their carrier bags asking, 'Have you had to use that today?') But also, I have personally asked a couple of UPS guys about their dog stories, and almost universally, they always say, "I am not concerned about the big dogs, it is the little ones that bite! I concur with that, I remember like yesterday approaching a parishioner's home, and his three Jack Russells came charging out, and it was like they were synchronized like he and they had practiced this, that the minute he yelled, 'They wont bite', I felt the pinch pain of a nip, on my backside.

But my point in this, is that Jesus calls for vigilance to counter surprise. He tells us that the end comes like a trap, it will pounce on us. So, be watchful and alert. He warns against 'drowsiness and distractions' (Lk 21:34) working against us. We have to keep one eye opened. Don't turn your back on anything. 'Stand up straight' is how He said it. So, how can we do that in this season of Advent?

I encourage us every day in Advent, to do a little, to keep vigilant. Change up your routine somewhat. Commit to some time each day to prayer (morning, or night, or a timeout break through day), even if only a few minutes to begin with, and check in with God. If such prayer time is already built into your schedule, then change it up and check in at another time in the day just to see. Add to that time a daily review or refresh – *How am I doing, God? Where am I seeing you, God?* Take the time to inspect your personal lists ('to do' lists, 'not done' lists, or 'one day I'll get to that' lists). Even the simple awareness, can bring you one step closer to accomplishment. This could be the Advent that changes it all.

Maybe some specific practices to try out this Advent, could be to pick up one of our daily devotional booklets, and start a daily devotion period. Pick up a new book and read something new. Commit to participating in a daily mass (if morning doesn't work because of work, then check out Tuesday evening 6:00 pm?) Or check out First Friday, First Saturday Devotion and offer a Holy Hour at church, this Friday 9:00 am-9:00 pm adoration in St Anthony Church all day - drop in for a Jesus visit for a minute throughout the day. Or volunteer with that group or agency that has been on your mind recently. But any spiritual practice and effort will keep us looking forward, standing straight, and praying with one eye open to welcome and receive Christ at his coming again – not surprised and no dismay, fright or perplexity in us at His coming again. That is Christmas. Jesus coming again, being born anew into us and our world at Christmas.