The season of Advent is a season of reflection and preparation of our hearts. During this liturgical season, we look back not only to events of the past but we also look forward to our future. We are reminded that Christ has already come to demonstrate his mission and will soon be coming again to redeem us. Indeed, we are living in a liminal and transitional time in bearing witness to this truth.

However, in spite of the seemingly joyful season that we find ourselves in, our scriptural text this morning offers us a somber reminder of the End of Time that may soon be upon us. This is not intended to ruin the spirit of the holiday season as WE define it to be, but as a matter of fact, it’s more of the other way around. **The true meaning of the Advent season has often been disguised by the false sense of temporary happiness and instant gratification of what our materialistic world has to offer.** The struggle between the **spiritual Advent** and the **materialistic Christmas** is prevalent and doesn’t seem to be going away anytime soon. These struggles are real and we must “stay awake and pay attention” to them!

In the passage that we read earlier from the gospel of Matthew, it invites us to “**Stay Awake and to Pay Attention**”. Stay awake doesn’t necessarily mean that we do our best not to fall asleep. Stay awake simply means that we ought to **be alert** and **pay attention of** our surrounding. Look for any sign of imminent danger ahead of us as well.

During my recent visit to Hong Kong, prior to my trip, I was given series of advices or warnings from my relatives of what to do and what NOT to do, in light of the social disturbance over there. I was repeatedly reminded that I need to “Stay Awake and Pay Attention” to what’s going on around me at all times. Have a backup contingency plan of where I was going to go and what I was going to do. And that I need to be fluid and adapt to whatever situations that might arise.

I must say that at no point, I felt unsafe if I knew ahead of plan strategically and make myself adaptable to whatever the situation it may be. I stayed alert by watching the news and anticipating where the potential troubling “activities” may be and to stay away from those districts. There were even weekly postings across the internet of events and activities of where they may take place, so that people can be informed ahead of time of where and when to participate in OR to avoid, otherwise you would be trapped without any transportations.

Since June, the people in Hong Kong have been on this kind of alert and fear of domestic terrors? But sadly to say that this has become an everyday norm for them by now. The city remains in high vigilant alert at least in the foreseeable future.

I think this kind of survival mindset can also be relevant for us metaphorically, as we reflect upon our traditional passage for this 1st Sunday of Advent. What does it mean when we are being asked to “stay awake and pay attention” es-cha-to-logically as we face the End of Time?

Our passage in Matthew today keeps our minds focused towards the imminent 2nd coming of Christ. It’s one of several Apocalyptic passages that Jesus alluded to near the end of this earthly ministry. Jesus placed a series of warnings to his followers with a great sense of urgency…that the End is near and we better be ready for it…and that we must “Stay Awake and Pay Attention”. No one knows exactly at what hour or what date that may be, not even the Son of Man Himself knows. Only the Father knows.

This means that we cannot afford to sit around and wait for Christ to come knocking on our doors to receive us. That’s not what Christ has in mind for us either. But instead, Christ has given us a series of instructions as to how we ought to go about living our everyday lives, as God’s witnesses to the world. We’ve been commissioned to live each day as if Christ were to be coming back tomorrow and to let others know about what it’s about to take place because God loves us all.

Christ has sent us on a mission to share this message of HOPE to others, as we lit our first Advent candle earlier. The Gospel writer Matthew illustrated this urgent warning by inviting us to look back into the time of Noah and the great flood…that was the 1st apocalypse. Very much like today, the people then were going about living their casual and apathetic lives. God seemed foreign to many in terms of their everyday behaviors and spiritual practices. Their relationship with God has been distant and lukewarm at best. Clearly God was not on the top of their priority list. Apathetically they had ignored God’s warnings of imminent judgement and calling of repentance, while continued to live their Godless, secularly lives to the fullest…without purpose, without HOPE, and paying little or no regard to its consequences.

God grieved over those who have indulged themselves into sinful living, to a point that he commissioned Noah to go and warn them about the impending judgements. The people needed a “Wake-Up” call, before it was too late and reach a point of no-return. But still, many refused to listen and felt that change was not necessary!

Unfortunately, as we’ve seen in our world today, many today appear to be heading in that pattern of secular God-less habitual living. We disregard fellow human lives and destroy the natural environment. We perpetrate human hatred and impose physical harm, emotional distress, stir fear and intimidation upon others, just because we have different view point on things from others. The sovereignty of God has been overwhelmed by our personal unbridle ambition. God grieves for the world and its people!

Through Noah, God sent a stern warning to the people that if they did not wake up and repent of their sins, they too would be wiped out entirely off the face of the earth. Only those who repented would be saved. Likewise, we have a missional mandate to lead those who might have fallen through the wayside, back to the path of righteousness in Christ.

As our Scripture today reminded us, the Son of God will return like a thief in the middle of the night, without any kind of warnings whatsoever. We must always be prepared and not be caught off-guard. We must stay awake, pay attention, and remain vigilant. **Only those who are prepared and ready will be saved, and those who are not, will be perished.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**The world that we live in today need more of Christ’s light to shine than ever before.** During this season of light, we need to adopt new perspectives and put on new spiritual lens so that we may look beyond those dazzling displays of holiday lights at the store front, around our houses and on our trees, in order to find Christ. Many may decorate their houses with hundreds and thousands of lights, but deep inside they may be living in a void of darkness, being entrapped by their own sins and emptiness.

Christ has commissioned us to bring HOPE upon those who may still be living in darkness. Some may be living in fears and terrors in various parts of the world that are under siege of battles, warfare and violence. **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be refugees living in exile from their homeland. **They need HOPE in Christ!**  Some may be immigrants, ethnic minorities in this country who are fearful about their well-being and their future. **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be struggling to meet end’s need, without proper healthcare or a place to rest their heads, or not sure of where their next meal may come.  **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be searching of meaning, direction, and purpose in life but without friends and families who would listen to them.  **They need HOPE in Christ!** Some may be in mourning and grieving the loss of loved ones with an empty void in their hearts. **They need HOPE in Christ!**

As we light each of the Advent candles over the next few weeks, may we truly be reminded of what this season is all about as we patiently wait for the coming of Christ once again.

May we look beyond the superficial world and beyond ourselves by identifying those who might need a little more “Jesus” than we do. Let us share Christ’s mercy with others by simple acts of kindness and compassion. Tell them the story of OUR HOPE and our FAITH in Christ.

Let us **stay awake, remain vigilant** and **pay attention** to the long-expected Savior filled with **HOPE, PEACE, JOY** and **LOVE**. ***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined.[[2]](#footnote-2)***

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Burgess John P., *Feasting on the Word, Year A Vol. 1,* P.22 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Isaiah 9:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)