

A reflection for the First Sunday of Advent, 2020

by Eric Celeste for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet's Advent Evening Prayer

Reading: Mark 13:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Be watchful! Be alert!

You do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man traveling abroad.

He leaves home and places his servants in charge,

each with his own work,

and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch.

Watch, therefore;

you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming,

whether in the evening, or at midnight,

or at cockcrow, or in the morning.

May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Reflection

Well, what a year.

May I be the first to welcome you to the new year. Is it OK with you if I use Advent to try to escape 2020 just a few weeks early? Would you like to join me? Here we are at the close of a year that has challenged all of us, and the reading that welcomes us into anticipation of the new year warns us to be watchful! To be alert! Who's house is this that we dare not fall asleep in?

I thought I knew what house I was in back in March. I had some understanding of that world, and then it turned upside down. A casual visit with my son has become a hazard to our health. A masked face has become a sign of caring and kindness. The grocer has become my hero. All of you have gone from friends across a room to postage stamp images in a gallery view.

We have been left in charge, and as Isaiah laments, “all our just deeds are like polluted rags, we have withered like leaves, and our crimes carry us away like the wind.” Could anything describe 2020 more succinctly?

So what do we look forward to this Advent? What awaits us? Where to from here?

Pope Francis has a book coming out this week called “Let us Dream” and I believe we caught a glimpse of it in an op-ed he wrote for the *New York Times* on Thanksgiving Day.

The coronavirus crisis may seem special because it affects most of humankind. But it is special only in how visible it is. There are a thousand other crises that are just as dire, but are just far enough from some of us that we can act as if they don't exist. Think, for example, of the wars scattered across different parts of the world; of the production and trade in weapons; of the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing poverty, hunger and lack of opportunity; of climate change. These tragedies may

seem distant from us, as part of the daily news that, sadly, fails to move us to change our agendas and priorities. But like the Covid-19 crisis, they affect the whole of humanity.

This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities — what we value, what we want, what we seek — and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.

You see, I don't believe Jesus was talking about a simple house when he called on us to be watchful and alert. I believe that that house is our very soul, the wellspring of our dreams. After molding us from the clay, our God travels abroad and leaves us in charge of our soul, our dreams. And we, the Loving Order of Radical Disciples, can work together to commit to those dreams, to create something new. The terrible break of this past year provides the cracks we can wedge our very selves into, opening this path ahead.

Listen to these questions asked by local singer-songwriter Ellis Delaney.

How would it be if everything that you thought you knew
Was turned upside down opposite from your point of view?
How would you feel if the ground was really the sky
And all of this time you've been walking
When you could have been flying?

What if all the birds were flying just to show us?
And all the trees were really holding the sky up?
Everything that you do matters in the end.
What if all of our mistakes are forgiven?

What if love is a lot of listening?
A little bit of time not pretending?
We are caught up in a world of daydreams.
What if loving what you have is everything?

What if all the birds were flying just to show us?
And all the trees were really holding the sky up?
And everything that you do matters so much?

How would you change your life?

I feel like this past year has helped me see past my world of daydreams. I feel more than ever like I am part of one world shared by all humankind. Yes, we face a thousand crises, but perhaps we have been walking when we could have been flying.

In his op-ed the Pope concludes...

God asks us to dare to create something new. We cannot return to the false securities of the political and economic systems we had before the crisis.

So my questions for you, watchful and alert, as you guard your house and soul on this first night of the new year, are these. What are you waiting for this Advent? What do you dream of? How would you change your life?