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On Staying Awake

David B. Burrell, C.S.C.

As one who regularly dozes during lectures, most sermons, and all official happenings, I am super-sensitive to the Advent warning: stay awake! "Stay awake," Mark insists, because "you never know when the time will come" (13:33); Luke implores: "Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man" (21:36).

So this sort of "staying awake" has nothing to do with propping our eyelids open for an "all-nighter." Luke connects it with "praying for the strength to survive." That strikes a chord, for each of us feels like these final weeks of the semester are strictly ones of survival. And they might even be pressing enough to drive the resident sceptic to pray for help.

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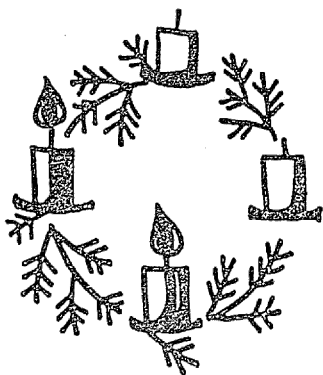
Yet both Mark and Luke look beyond our immediate concerns to the "coming of the Lord." Where can we find this Son of Man who promises to come again, except inside our work? As we struggle to make a fair showing, we might find ourselves pausing to ask "why the strain?" What am I after? Success, of course, but that's not yet a question stopper. Why success? To what end?

That's not a question we ask very often, yet we know that it can arise, especially for those who do succeed. Mark and Luke remind us that whatever we do can help to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. Especially if it contributes to peacemaking and to people sharing with others the good things they have discovered on the way.

What sets Luke and Mark off from the worldly-wise is their conviction that we are all together on a journey -- to meet the Lord in his coming. There is no set goal we can reach by performing

well; that performance rather marks the stages in a longer journey. And we can begin to feel that as we place our efforts at the service of the Kingdom which Jesus preached and whose coming He promised. Failures often count even more than successes on that journey, for failing makes us go back over our usual patterns and re-assess them.

Where are we heading? What is the point of our study and learning? Our accomplishments are so fragile. How can we assure they will last? Only by directing them to the service of "these least of my brother and sisters"-the Lord tells us. So we are warned to "stay awake" to the opportunities offered us to do just that, and warned off hoarding for ourselves. Then we will not only survive, but be able "to stand with confidence before the Son of Man." These days are given us to prepare to meet Him in our Christmas celebration. May that be true for each of us.



Second Sunday of Advent

Like the voices in the readings for this Second Sunday of Advent, Thomas Merton continues to call us to repentance and renewed hope. He addresses us as a contemporary prophet, "a voice in the desert, crying 'Make ready the way of the Lord.' "

A Prophetic Voice

Sr. Elena Malits, CPC

Sr. Elena Malits is a professor
of Religious Studies at St. Mary's.



December 10 marks the sixteenth anniversary of the untimely death of Thomas Merton, the most celebrated Catholic convert, contemplative monk, and religious writer of our time. His autobiography, The Seven Storey Mountain, was published in the late 1940's and became overnight a best seller. It was the story of a young man's passionate search for meaning in his life and the world, a search that eventually led Merton into the Church and a Trappist monastery. He possessed a remarkable gift for articulating his personal experience in such a way that led others to recognize their own religious quest in Merton's story.

During the next decade Merton produced numerous books on prayer, silence, and solitude, such as Seeds of Contemplation, No Man Is an Island, and Bread in the Wilderness. Merton tapped the riches of the Christian mystical tradition, but again always spoke out of his own experience of the struggle and joy in the growing life of the spirit. His diary of the early 1950's, The Sign of Jonas, dealt with the paradox of being a contemplative monk and the busiest of writers. Again Merton's account of being pulled in seemingly contradictory directions and not knowing how God entered in to these tensions spoke powerfully to ordinary Catholics and illuminated their daily perplexities.

In the 1960's the popular "spiritual writer" became the controversial social critic. In Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, his 1960's journal, Merton showed that "true solitude is deeply aware of the world's needs." In Seeds of Destruction and Faith and Violence he took on the issues of the nuclear arms race, the Vietnam war, racism, ideological conflict, runaway technology, affluence and consumerism, mass culture. He sifted these problems through his own soul and spoke to American Catholics with new vigor. Always precocious, Merton was twenty years ahead of the U.S. bishops on the nuclear threat and economic inequities.

Prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas
BEFORE READING AND STUDY



Grant me grace
O MERCIFUL GOD
to desire ardently all
that is pleasing to Thee,
to examine it prudently
to acknowledge it
truthfully
& to accomplish it
perfectly
for the praise & glory
of Thy Name
AMEN

Advent Penance Service

Advent is the season for preparation for the coming of Christ - a time of joyful expectation and of reconciliation as we prepare to celebrate God in human flesh. A PENANCE SERVICE will take place at SACRED HEART CHURCH, TUESDAY DECEMBER 11th, 10:00 P.M. Confessors are available after the service.

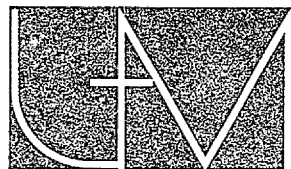
Advent Clothing Drive

"WE ARE NOT TO THROW AWAY THOSE THINGS THAT CAN BENEFIT OUR NEIGHBOR. GOODS ARE CALLED GOOD BECAUSE THEY CAN BE USED FOR GOOD: THEY ARE INSTRUMENTS OF GOOD IN THE HANDS THAT USE THEM PROPERLY"

St. Clement

The Advent Clothing for the St. Vincent de Paul Society will be Thursday December 13th till Tuesday December 18th. The need is great for sweaters, pants and warm clothing for the poor in South Bend. Boxes for your donations are in each dorm and at Sacred Heart Church and University Ministry Badin Hall Office.

Prayers are requested for the repose of the soul of Kerry Axelson, formerly of Badin Hall, who died on Friday November 30th.



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