

When I used to hear today's Gospel, I thought the point was that when the Master of the house returned from his journey late at night, he didn't want to find the gatekeeper asleep on the job. And then Jesus applies that story to us, to be ready when he returns at the end of the world for the Last Judgment. But there's more to it than that. In Jesus's culture, the Master wants to return to a home where everybody's awake to greet him, to receive him, to welcome him back eagerly. After a journey, he doesn't want to come home to a house where everyone's asleep.

The story isn't meant to be just about getting our souls in shape, being morally ready for Christ's Second Coming – it's also about having enthusiasm for Christ's return, missing him, wanting to give him a bear hug. It's having the attitude where we want him to come back to us, we're waiting for him in joyful anticipation. Having that positive attitude for Christ is also an important part of this Gospel.

St. Augustine captured our need for this attitude so well. He wrote “[W]hat sort of love of Christ is it to fear his coming? ... We love him, yet we fear his coming. Are we really certain that we love him? Or do we love our sins more?” St. Augustine sees this oxymoron clearly. People say they love Jesus, but at the same time they're afraid of meeting him. So St. Augustine rightfully asks: How can you really love someone you're scared of?

We need to feel the love and conquer our fear! The Advent season isn't just time for an annual examination of conscience; and it's about more than us waiting for Christ. God is patiently waiting for us, too, waiting to be loved instead of feared! This Advent is a time to change our view of God, that God isn't some distant object to be feared, but someone who really cares about me.

See the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as persons, who love us, who enjoy being with us, and who want us to love them back so much. Even when we struggle and fall, God's loving divine mercy wraps itself around us. Don't be scared of God anymore. God wants to be part of our lives. ... God craves our love, not our fear. God walks with us on the road we travel, and he expects we'll have some mishaps on the road. When we fall, God doesn't stop loving us.

God gave each one of us a soul, a personality; he made it, he loves it. He never gets tired of us. Accept that, believe it, and our attitude about God changes, and our prayer changes. Keep praying liturgical prayers, like the Mass; keep praying devotional prayers, like the rosary and the Divine Mercy devotion; and keep praying the written prayers we know. But draw closer to God using our own words, praying like Jesus is our friend (he is!); remembering that Our Father is the best, loving Dad in the world (he is!) and he's always approachable.

Get over fear by starting the day with a short prayer, using the day's schedule that's ahead as the basis. Thank God for what we look forward to, and ask for our Father's help where we'll need it. When we get emotional, take a moment and share our emotions with him, even when we're mad at him. God loves prayer with passion! If we're exhausted from Christmas shopping, sit down, take a breather, and just enjoy the Spirit of God's love, just rest with the Spirit, relax with his Spirit, no words needed. That's prayer. Pray from the heart; it will revitalize you.

A monk once said: wake up before death wakes you up. Advent reminds us to prepare ourselves, and that Christ wants us to be waiting for him with love and joy, anticipating the total fulfillment he will bring us. Welcome our Lord into our lives every day in prayer, “as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

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