

One movie that made a lasting impression on me was *Slaughterhouse Five*. It gave me a glimpse of eternity, how God sees time. The main character's human life is like a mountain range: he can focus on any peak, any point in his life, and experience it, or re-live it, but the whole mountain range, his whole life, is there, beginning to end.

Our First Reading from the prophet Isaiah reminded me of this. He says: let's climb the mountain of the Lord. That's the meaning and purpose of our earthly life: the journey to get to God. We can't see what's ahead, but we know God wants us to keep going in his direction, growing towards him. God sees it all.

Jesus also wants us to see that life on earth is not our end-goal, like unbelievers think. Imagine what this planet would be like if everyone thought that way: only caring about our own wants and paying no attention to anyone else's. Being obsessed with creating heaven on earth would create hell on earth. Like Isaiah, Jesus wants us to see that our life on earth is the path to God.

That's why He commands us in the Gospel: stay awake! Expect him! Jesus counsels us to live as if the end of our life were just around the corner, so we live in a way that pleases God and benefits our neighbor. Take note of the future, but only so it influences our current behavior.

Because it's not enough to know that life is a path. We have to travel that path, to beware of the different forms of self-indulgence and self-centeredness that can distract us from our destination.

All things are good, but they become evil when they take control of our lives. As addicts know, then we become like black holes, turned in on ourselves, destroying what comes near us. Jesus wants us to use our limited time on earth wisely: loving God and seeking what is good for our neighbor.

Advent addresses what I think is the biggest threat to salvation for us Americans: that we're too future-oriented, always planning ahead, thinking about the next thing to happen instead of being aware of what's going on right now. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us disciples to remember the end-time, but only so that we live our days in the present better, where we can make a difference now, and live the gospel now, and not to plan on doing it later – later may never come. Be present to the moment.

Advent is a call to action, to live the Gospel now, because our time is limited. Let's use this Advent season to confront the routines and selfish patterns of conduct that distract us from God's ways, change 'em out, and continue our journey to God.

One way we could journey closer to God is to prepare an elevator speech for Christ. An elevator speech is what sales people and jobhunters prepare, a 30 or 60 second speech they can give anywhere and anytime there's an opportunity to promote their products or job skills. We can do one for Christ, by reflecting on what Christ has done for us in our personal life, and prepare a 30 or 60-second speech on one or two of our favorites. Then we can share it with someone when they tell us about a difficulty or loss they're going through. It's an effective and powerful way to lead people to Christ. It's evangelization.

We're not the same person we were last Advent – we've changed because of our experiences this past year. We've grown in depth and character, not so much from our successes as from our failures, our inabilities and inadequacies, our tragedies, those big and small wounds and bruises that shaped our souls. ... Just like Jesus did: he had to experience the humiliation of Good Friday to reach the glory of Easter Sunday.

It's our sufferings and humiliations that change the course of our lives. They're necessary if we're to build depth and character. They prepare us for a deeper friendship with God. ... Don't fear the future. This life is our journey to God. If we give ourselves away to others on the journey, our souls will build depth and character, and we'll be ready to meet Christ.

First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2019, Fr. John Ozella