

Homily for First Sunday of Advent

I think the saddest three words in the English language are: “It’s too late.”

I remember a priest I knew from the Midwest. He was a hard-working individual. The bishop of his diocese wasn’t terribly supportive – in fact, he wasn’t supportive at all. My friend sincerely believed that the bishop did not even know he existed.

After years of pouring himself into his work and feeling totally unsupported and completely drained, he made an appointment with the bishop to order to submit his resignation from the priesthood. The bishop was shocked. He said to him: “You are the best priest I have. There is no one in the diocese who does better work than you.” My friend looked at the bishop and said: “If only you had said that to me two or three years ago. Now...now it’s too late.”

I think of a married couple I know. One day the husband came home to learn from his wife that she was leaving him. He couldn’t understand why. He told her how much he loved her, how much she meant to him. She responded by telling him that for years he had never expressed any affection, never shown any love, simply expected her to “do her part.” And now his words were just “too late.”

How many of us in our own lives can recall experiences when someone has said something to us or done something for us when it was just too late to make a difference? And even worse, how many of us have let slip through our hands untold opportunities to express our love and our gratitude to those who have been good to us. And now it's too late to go back and do it over again.

On this first Sunday of Advent we are reminded that “the time is coming.” But the catch is we don't know when it will be. So Jesus charges us to “be watchful! be alert!” Jesus' words are a comfortable partner to Isaiah's shouting at God and saying: “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.” But even Isaiah comes to the conclusion that everything is in God's hands...for “we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.” So we must be patient.

But what must we be doing while we are being patient? How should we wait for God to “come down” and the “master to arrive”? I would look to St. Paul in today's second reading for the answer. Paul is always taking the time to tell his readers how important they are, how enriched his life is because of them, how blessed they are and how blessed he is for knowing them. Paul doesn't want to end up being “too late.” He wants them to know now how important and good and wonderful they are.

Maybe we should learn from Paul. Maybe we need to discover that our waiting and longing and watching for the coming of God should not be wasted. Rather, it should be a time of lavishing our care and concern upon each other.

The time between now and Christmas is brief. We have a million tasks that confront us. This first Sunday is intended to remind us that we can become so busy with the tasks of Christmas preparation that we fail to do the one thing that really counts – to learn to wait for the coming of the Lord by loving one another again and again. And if we don't, than I fear that when the Master comes and we are asked to look upon our lives we will realize that it is "too late" to give the love we should have given every day of our lives.