



## Things to Ponder

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### Get in Step with the Stride of the Savior (Based on Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)

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By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Thanksgiving Day has come and gone. The traditional turkey dinner was prepared, served, eaten and digested. Table talk and banquet banter gave way to the cheers and jeers that punctuated the after-dinner Redskins-Dallas football game. Sooner or later the dirty dishes were washed. Guests eventually said “goodbye.” Full stomachs necessitated a later afternoon nap. A slow and quiet atmosphere eventually replaced the hurried, harried pace of the day. Maybe you were looking forward to a weekend of rest and relaxation.

But today's Gospel, (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36) as we begin the season of Advent and a new liturgical year, comes as a rude awakening. There is nothing calm, quiet and cozy about the message that Jesus gives us today. Jesus turns up the volume and batters our ears with a cacophony of catastrophe. Ominous signs appear in the sun, moon and stars as these heavenly powers are shaken from their firm orbits. We hear the explosive crashing and splashing of the surging surf on a rocky shore. We are warned of imminent tribulation, anxieties and assaults. Today's Gospel has all the trappings of a red alert announcing a terrorist attack

When we carefully and prayerfully read the entire Gospel text, however, we realize that we are in error about the terror. The shaking and quaking, the crashing and splashing are like a cosmic drum roll or a galactic fanfare. They alert us not to a coming catastrophe but to the climactic coming of Jesus Christ at the end of time. Instead of our having to cringe and cower in fear we hear this comforting command: “Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

These words comprise the clarion call of Advent that is meant to override the blare of our secular seasonal songs that are more interested in the coming of Santa Claus and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer than in the coming of the one and only King of Christmas. “Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” These words mark the rousing rhythm of Advent that is meant to slow down the frantic pace of holiday shopping for our gift-list folks who already have more stuff than they know what to do with.

“Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” These words

provide the measured beat that is meant to get us in step with the stride of the Savior who comes to trample down greed and violence, hatred and apathy, and to dance with the poor and the hungry, the imprisoned and the ill, the unemployed and the unappreciated.

With raised heads and open eyes we begin Advent not by looking back to the stable in Bethlehem, but to the future, to the Second Coming of Christ with power and great glory as today's Gospel describes it. There is no way of knowing when this day will come. It really doesn't matter. This is the day when the dead shall rise from their tombs, so we will experience it even if we are not physically alive when it arrives. Advent reminds us that sooner or later Jesus will certainly come to us and for us. What are we to do to prepare ourselves for His coming? Jesus gives us two additional commands: "Beware," and "Be vigilant."

Beware that we do not become drowsy like Thanksgiving Day diners. Beware that we do not become so caught up in the commercial side of Christmas that we have no energy or enthusiasm for the spiritual side of the season. Be vigilant, be alert and awake to the many opportunities that Advent offers us to refocus our faith, refresh our hope, and renew our love for Jesus. Try to participate more in daily Mass during Advent so that we can hear the scriptures unfolding the mystery and the beauty of this season, rather than just getting "weekly updates" on Sunday.

We begin Advent by looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. We begin Advent by reaffirming our faith that Jesus will come and rouse us from the sleep of death to give Him an account of our lives. We begin Advent by focusing on the eternal life to which Christ calls us all. It's only by anticipating His future coming that we can appreciate the significance of His First Coming 2000 years ago at a stable in Bethlehem.

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