

HOMILY ~ FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 2/3, 2023

There was a woman who was at O'Hare Airport in Chicago where she was waiting for a connecting flight. She had a two hour layover so she stopped at a store and bought a newspaper and a package of cookies to help pass the time. She sat down at a table and started to read her newspaper. After a short time, she heard the rustling of paper. She peeked around her newspaper and saw an older man who was well dressed sitting at the table opening the cookies. She thought to herself, *I cannot believe that man is stealing my cookies.* She was not sure what to do. She was going to confront him, but she was not sure how he would react; so she reached around her newspaper and took one of the cookies. Then the man took another cookie, and they went back and forth like that for a little while. The woman became more and more angry. Finally the man took the last cookie, broke it in half and left half for her as he got up and left. She could not believe what had just happened. When it came time to board her flight, she reached into her bag to get her boarding pass; and there was her package of cookies.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus tells us ***“Be watchful! Be alert.”*** Jesus is talking about being prepared for his second coming or being prepared for our own death, whichever is sooner, because we do not know when this will happen. He is also telling us to be watchful, be alert, so that we can see how he comes into our lives every day. He is always there in our joys and sorrows, in our victories and our failures. Jesus never told us that life would be easy, but he did promise that he will always be with us. I think the spiritual life is all about being watchful, being alert and paying attention so that we can see how God is present in our lives every day.

We live much of our lives on automatic pilot. Psychologists tell us that 43% of what we do every day is done by habit, and we never think about it. To an extent, this is a good thing. If we struggled over every little decision every day, we would never get anything done. Some of our habits develop over time without us ever thinking about them, and they are not good habits. Some habits were good when we developed them, but they are no longer working for us. If we live life on automatic pilot, we will never hear what God is calling us to do.

There are many terrible things happening in the world today, and you may be asking yourself, *Where is God in all of that?* Why doesn't he just straighten things out for us? I am not sure why, but I know that God is

God and I am not. God is not in the violence, hatred and evil. He is not there. But he is there in the people who are in positions where they can affect change for the better. We do not hear much about that on the news or on social media, but they are there. Most of us are not in a position where we can affect major change, but we can affect what is going on in our corner of the world. Jesus is telling us to be watchful, be alert. Pay attention to what he is calling us to do, and it is all about the love. The love Jesus is talking about is not a warm fuzzy feeling kind of love. It is about how we treat one another with loving kindness.

So, let's go back to the story I told a few minutes ago. When I read the story, I absolutely understood the woman's reaction. That man was stealing her cookies. Her negativity bias told her that there is imminent danger, she must pay attention and she reacted negatively. But was there really any danger? He was not stealing her only source of food. I am sure she could have bought another package of cookies if she really wanted them. If she thought about it, she would have realized that. If she were watchful and alert, maybe she would have heard what God was calling her to do; and she could have reacted with loving kindness.

Where was God in that situation? God was definitely with that man who shared his cookies. He acted with loving kindness. My guess is he had the same reaction that the woman had when she was stealing his cookies. But he was watchful and alert. He was not on automatic pilot. He heard what God was calling him to do, and he acted with loving kindness. I think the first step in acting with loving kindness is not to react on automatic pilot. And the little things are important. Sometimes the little things make all of the difference.

Be watchful, be alert.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim