

November 30, 2025

First Sunday in Advent

“Wake up!”

Romans 13:11-14

I’m preaching on our short reading from Paul’s letter to the church at Rome today and to do so it must be understood that the Gospel is not explicit but implied here—in the front of this letter Paul has already established that He is writing to the people of God who stand redeemed by Christ, saved by grace through faith. The back side of this letter is exhortation for believers to live in this grace.

So he starts out saying “*Besides this,*” this being how the law is fulfilled through love, “*you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.*”

Note the immediacy in that statement: “the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.” He is writing to people who have received the Gospel, who have been baptized, who regularly attend church and receive the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. These are people who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have been awakened to the light of salvation. These are people like you and like me. Yet St. Paul still says waking up is a thing they need to do now. This speaks volumes.

Christians, and I think I’m on solid ground saying all Christians, have a bad habit of getting distracted by life, by the world, by the reality in front of us. The problem is that reality is like the TikTok app. I’ve never used TikTok and never intend to, but from what I understand it mostly displays short videos, but the algorithm is designed to feed you more and more of those that pique your fancy and you get sucked into watching it endlessly. For all practical purposes it puts you to sleep to everything around you as you remain stuck looking at your phone.

This happens to Christians on a daily basis. What is our reality? Christ! We possess eternal life today in Christ. We are His treasured possession. Our very life is in Him. St. Paul makes that clear when he starts writing this section saying, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” We are living sacrifices, wholly given to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet every day, what happens? We get distracted by life. We get frustrated, upset and angry over things we shouldn’t. We obsess over goals, or obstacles, or responsibilities and the focus becomes me and whatever thing I’m dealing with; Jesus and my life in Him drops off the radar. This happens and, unfortunately, we can start making a habit of it. We can start falling asleep to our reality in Christ as our focus and obsession becomes me, my life in the world, and my will and desires regarding it.

This is why St. Paul says to believing Christians, “*the hour has come for you to wake up.*” That time is now. Today. Every day. Every hour even.

This season of the church today is focused on the Advent of Christ. Because of the holiday coming up on December 25th we have a tendency to focus on His first advent 2000+ years ago. But we know He lived a perfect life and accomplished His work of redemption by the cross and is now ascended to the right hand of the Father. So of course, we look forward to His

second advent of the Last Day when He returns in glory. This is what St. Paul is talking about when he says, *“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”*

But what he is emphasizing here is that Christ stands today advented, revealed upon your very body and soul. We do not live this life in the dark waiting for Christ to arrive. We stand washed, sanctified, saved and we must be wary not to fall asleep to this reality in a world that is not part of it.

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand.” St. Paul paints a picture of one stubbornly pulling the covers up over his head in bed, refusing to walk in the light. He is not talking about unbelievers here, either. He is exhorting Christians, you and me, not to fall into the trap of getting so comfortable with the world and its sin that we end up shunning the day; the light of Christ.

“So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Some folks read this and think, “Well there goes the Bible telling us we have to be good again.” That totally misses the point. Paul is not laying down the law here. He is exhorting us to live in our Gospel reality gifted us by the Holy Spirit by grace through faith in Christ. We stand redeemed. We are saints, living forever in God’s grace—children of light through no merit of our own. He is calling us to wear this reality in Christ like armor, enabled to withstand the temptations of the darkness because we stand in the light.

If this were law, we would be crushed by this proclamation. How many times do we find ourselves in the darkness of sin each day? Too many! Yet this is why St. Paul’s call to action is immediate: “Wake up!” We do it all the time. Wake up. Repent. Turn away from that sin yet again. Stand washed of it in your Holy Baptism into Christ, and walk again as in the light of Christ’s day.

We indeed are at risk. It is a tempting world and the evil enemy would like nothing better than to have you develop the TikTok tunnel vision focused on its darkness.

Maybe take your bulletin home with you today and take some quiet prayer and devotion time and read this epistle lesson again. Then honestly examine your life for any attitude or practice where you are stubbornly pulling the spiritual covers over your head and resisting the light of Christ’s day because you’re liking the darkness too much. Maybe you’ve become comfortable with a favorite sin. Maybe you’re way too focused on the material blessings. Maybe you’re too focused on your place in this world and not the one to whom you belong. Is there a place where you are hanging out in the darkness, ignoring or avoiding Christ’s dawning upon you?

If so, recognize it for what it is and pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the wisdom to see the blessed reality you are resisting and then joyfully throw back the covers, cast off the works of darkness and walk as a child of light. Get in the habit of doing that a lot. We all need to do it a lot.

The wonderful news is that St. Paul is talking to you; a redeemed child of God. This God sends you His Word and His Sacrament to remind you of who you are in the full forgiveness of sins. Happily and joyfully heed this wonderful Gospel call to wake up to His light and accept the wonderful invitation; *“O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”*