

***Ad Te Levavi (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent)***- Romans 13:11-14:

St. Paul tell us to wake up from sleep. Why? Because we are now nearer to our salvation than when we first believed. The night is almost over. The day is dawning. In other words, the time of sin and the devil's tyranny is coming to an end. His days are numbered. He's already been defeated. His head has already been crushed by the Seed of the Woman. Sin has already been atoned for. Since Christ has come, the light of God's grace is shining. It shines on us right now as we sing together, confess together, and listen together about what Christ our Savior has done. When the gospel is believed, taught, and confessed in his church, the rays of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, are beaming. And like the morning's first rays shine through your window onto your pillow, the gospel of Jesus Christ is opening your eyes to see his day coming closer and closer. So wake up! Consider what time it is! Your Savior is coming!

People often talk about being woken up. They are referring to times when they realize that they were wrong about something or that they were being misled. They weren't recognizing reality for what it was, but now they can see it. They are awake. Even worldly people can experience these awakenings. But being awakened to certain moral truths or social realities isn't the kind of awakening Jesus brings. Jesus awakens us to look forward to eternal life, to the resurrection of our bodies in his heavenly kingdom. Worldly awakenings can only find their hope in this world, which is passing away.

Of course, some worldly awakenings are nobler than others. It's good when people wake up to the fact that they were wrong to promote evil things and then stop promoting these evil things. If people think that abortion is a right, fornication is totally fine, overcharging is just business, and living to satisfy your own pleasures is completely normal and acceptable, then we should want them to wake up to the reality that these things are wicked and that they will only leave them bankrupt. People do wake up to this reality. Actors and celebrities wake up to the fact that Hollywood and the media are a cesspool of filth and immoral living. They speak out, lose their celebrity status, and continue to speak against the evils of abortion, sexual deviancy, and other things promoted by those who make billions off of us watching their movies and shows. It's good that they have come to realize these things. But the waking up they experience isn't necessarily the waking up described in the Bible. They are not necessarily awake to the fact that the Son of God has come in the flesh to earn for them salvation and that he is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Their awakening might lead them to some kind of political activism, living off the grid, or forming a following online. But no matter how much they have come to embrace certain virtues, this is not the awakening Christ gives us. As long as they don't recognize that Christ, who is coming to judge all flesh, is the true reality, then they will always focus only on earthly things, which will finally rot and go away.

St. Paul tells us to wake up right after he gets done telling us to obey the earthly authorities that are over us. Give honor to whom honor is due, taxes to whom taxes are due. Don't do evil, because the governing authorities are God's servants of wrath against those who do evil. Paul is not teaching us some kind of political theory. He isn't endorsing this or that form of government. He isn't interested in a plan to gain power and influence in this world. No, Paul is simply teaching us to live at peace, doing good and avoiding evil. He says, "Don't owe anyone anything but to love one another." This is what it means to live in the light of Christ. It isn't to get control of the government. It is to do your duty, which God has given you. He might give you the duty to serve in the government. Then you serve as one who loves God and his neighbor. He may simply give you your duty as a father, a mother, or some kind of servant. Whatever work you have received from God, you serve as one who knows that the kingdoms of this world are going to end, and you are called to do good to those in your care.

And do this, Paul says, especially since you know the time you're living in. You know that the kingdom of God has already come. The Son of God, the Word by whom all things were made, became flesh, was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered for our sins, died, was buried, and was raised again to declare sinners righteous. You know that this is the time of salvation, because the gospel of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed, sins are being forgiven, and faith is being counted as righteousness in God's sight. You are awake to this reality.

Christ came into Jerusalem as the King. He is the Son of David, the heir to the throne God promises to David. But this kingdom is not a worldly kingdom. The people shout, Hosanna, save us now! This is the salvation Jesus came to bring. He is the God in the highest, coming in the name of his Father to save sinners from the wrath to come. He didn't come in the pomp of this world, fighting against physical oppressors. No, he came against the spiritual forces of darkness. He came in gentleness and humility, because he knew that he was serving his Father. He didn't need to rally up the crowds and take advantage of high emotions in some social awakening. He brings a much better kingdom than that. He came to do much more than make you realize that this or that sin you were committing was bad. He came to save you from sin. He came to do much more than make you appreciate how good God's law is. He came to fulfill the law for you. As Paul says, love is the fulfillment of the law, and this is exactly what Jesus did. He loved. He loved with perfect love. As we sing in the hymn:

Love caused Thy incarnation,  
Love brought Thee down to me;  
Thy thirst for my salvation  
Procured my liberty.  
O love beyond all telling,  
That led Thee to embrace,  
In love all love excelling,  
Our lost and fallen race!

This is the King who awakens us from sleep. He does much more than get us to realize that this world is filled with evil. He shows us a much better world, which is to come. He who came in the flesh promises that he will come again. And he is coming quickly. When you know this reality, then you are awake. This isn't a restless insomnia as you wonder how you will win his favor. No, it is a rested, peaceful awareness that Christ embraces you as his own, forgives you, declares you righteous, and is coming to rescue you. Again, as we sing in the hymn:

Ye need not toil nor languish  
Nor ponder day and night  
How in the midst of anguish  
Ye draw Him by your might.  
He comes, He comes all willing,  
Moved by His love alone,  
Your woes and troubles stilling;  
For all to Him are known.

To know that the day of Christ's return is nearer today than it was when you first believed is to have hope. This is hope, which presses on, certain of what is coming, like a runner who knows that every stride he takes he is closer to the finish line.

When you have Christ as your true light, then you grow to despise every dark thing, which would snatch you away from him. You grow to hate evil, especially the evil you still find within your own sinful nature. But you are prepared to fight against temptations and resist the passions of your wicked desires. You are prepared to fight, because you have been given the very light of Christ. You have it right now in his Word. When you listen to this precious gospel, when you read it and talk about it at home, it gives you confidence and boldness to resist all the powers of darkness. Paul calls it the armor of light. It's the armor you received when you were baptized into Christ. As Paul says in Galatians 3:27, as many of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. You have been clothed with Christ. You are therefore equipped by his Word to

resist every filthy work of darkness warring against your soul. As Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don't plan to have your fleshly desires aroused."

It's important to be aware of these sins. It's important to wake up to the reality that getting drunk, sexual sins, and wild living will only leave you in the dark. We need to wake up to the fact that bickering and being jealous of people will only drive faith, hope, and love out of our hearts. But it is the light of Christ, which truly awakens us to the reality God has established for us. He sees us through his Son Jesus. Through Christ, whom we are wearing right now, God sees us as his righteous children. His face shines upon us. With this assurance, you can resist the desires of your flesh. With this hope, you can press on, awake and alert. You can strive to do what is pleasing to God with the love he himself has given you.

So when you realize that you have been sleeping, that you have been misled to satisfy your own desires, that you have been following the influences of this godless world, then wake up! But don't just be awakened to some moral, political, or social agenda. No, wake up to Christ. Let the beams of his Word give you confidence and joy that your salvation is closer now than when you first believed. Amen.