

## Shaken, Waking Up

Advent starts with a bang this year if Jesus' words in Sunday's Gospel reading are true. Luke 21: 25-36 describes the terrifying world-scape into which He will enter, not as a helpless babe but as Almighty Judge separating the faithful from frauds. Season's grievings!

History unwinds like a ticking bomb: explosions in a Parisian concert hall, a Mali hotel, and a Russian-bound jet over Egypt contract like excruciating birth pains. Brussels shuts down as innocents are subject to a kind of martial law as authorities search for the fearless few who now hold the world captive to terror. We are united in fear. Disempowered people invoke murderous demons (Rev. 9:21) in an effort to captivate the world by the threat of random massacres. Nothing new under the sun: Jesus said that 'People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world' (LK 21:26).

On one hand, it all seems far away from our insulated roost in Kansas City. But the spirit of murder increases here too, just as arbitrarily and perhaps sourced in the same theme of disempowered people grasping at demonic exaltation. Not long ago, I rode my bike home for lunch through a pleasant street of small condos, mostly inhabited by the elderly. An hour later in broad daylight, a man broke into two units and brutally murdered 5 persons.

I say this not to frighten but to alert you this Advent. Where does our security lie, in false prophecies of peace or in the peace that can only come through Jesus Christ who promises not a harmonious world but Himself? Alfred Delp, a German priest who contested Hitler and was executed, wrote this before his martyrdom: 'There is perhaps nothing we need today than to be genuinely shaken up. Where life is firm we need to sense its firmness; where it is unstable and has no foundation we need to know this too and to endure it...Advent is a time when we need to be shaken. The necessary condition for Advent's fulfillment is the renunciation of presumptuous attitudes and dreams through which we build imaginary worlds...Being shattered, being awakened—only with these is life made capable of Advent.'

Jesus alerts us that the darkening world-scape can weigh us down 'with everyday anxieties' (LK 21:35). He also notes that our response to such fear may well be drugging ourselves with 'carousing and drunkenness' (v.35). Friends, might we who love the Holy One not fall prey to deadening ourselves with foolish diversions but rather seek Him first as our foundation then prayerfully help secure others in Christ? Let us heed Jesus' command this season 'to always be on the watch—vigilant—and pray that we might have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent so that we can stand before the Son of Man' (v. 36).

Our Advent begins with preparing for Jesus' second coming. We might begin by identifying and renouncing the illusions we employ to ward off fear. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and so establish our lives on the only foundation that will withstand the shaking to come.

'When these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your hands because your redemption is near' (LK 21:28).