

**Reflection on the Gospel-1st Sunday of Advent Year A
(Matthew 24:37-44)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

“Where is the Life we have lost in living?” asks the Chorus in T. S. Eliot's *The Rock*. The Jesus of Matthew's gospel is implicitly asking the same question as Eliot's Chorus. He is making much the same observation as Henry David Thoreau, “Most [people] lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.” We are invited to find Life in our living and to sing the songs that are in us. We are to be agents of our own future rather than unthinking participants in the destruction of our planet. Right now, the human community is challenged in unprecedented ways to restore the life we have lost by living beyond our means and by destructively exploiting the riches of the Earth.

As we begin a new liturgical year, Matthew's Jesus invites us to contemplate the ultimate realities even as we attend to the demands of the present. He tells us to be “awake”, to be “ready” all the time, not because death or the end of the world are around the corner, but because we need to recognise the multiple “advents” or arrivals of the Christ, the Human One, who calls us beyond self-absorption to Life. He reminds us that we are no different from our forebears who from earliest days have gone about their daily business without being sufficiently attentive to what really matters.

In our times, we have allowed thieves to break in and plunder our planet, our common home, because thieves come in guises that we fail to recognise. They so often look just like us and do the things we do. It may be that we must first be attentive to our own ways of plundering the house that is home to all of God's creatures.

We spend much of our time looking back. That has its place, since our history informs our present and helps us in shaping our future, though all the while we know with Auden that ‘[t]he past is foreign country: they do things differently there’. Advent invites us to look forward rather than back and to dream gospel-inspired dreams that will enable creative change in our own lives and in the life of our planet. It invites us to be awake, to be ready for any eventuality.

Dreams and visions have always been the precursors to effective and life-giving change. We need the grace to see visions and to dream dreams that make for justice and peace and that permit us to walk more freely in the light of God's ways. We seek the grace to “see” God's word as did the prophet Isaiah in the first reading (Isa 2:1-5). We need to put our energy into creating life-generating systems that enable us to move forward in the paths of gospel compassion and love.

Matthew 24:37-44 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Human One. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Human One. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your master is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Human One is coming at an unexpected hour.