

Wednesday of the First Week of Advent

Last Sundays' Gospel story from the Gospel of Mark contained the injunction to "Be watchful! Stay Alert! Watch!"

But for what? For what are we watchful? To be alert to what?

Most of us have a pretty hard time separating our emotions from the rest of our lives and we find ways to be constantly stimulated, precisely, to not have to watch for anything or be alert to anything, to just have our mind filled with anything rather than nothing.

Of course, what with the arrival of cellphones, tablets and iPads, and computers we have an endless supply of distractions at our fingertips and we habitually fill any nanosecond of downtime with a screen upon which we gaze and we find ourselves transported to places we never imagined but we are not bored.

I find myself doing quite routinely what I found so offensive not so long ago-----I take out my phone and check email and texts while I am in a real conversation with another person. I have become the rudeness that I took offense at in others but in my case it is justified or so I tell myself.

We associate an empty mind with boredom and boredom is something we abhor, probably, because we have internalized some mix of Anglo-Saxon Protestant/Catholic insecurity and think that if we are not at least thinking something that we are not earning our daily bread if we are not actually doing something.

Others of us or all of us from time to time, obsess on some thought or thoughts usually associated with some kind of negative experience that has happened or we are afraid might happen and the only thing that we can think about is that negativity that has become a part of our conscious mind.

If we are not careful we are dominated by our emotions, we worship them as is evident in the new alternative truth world that we inhabit where what we feel is enough, we need no evidence, no research, no reading, nothing, as just feeling is validation enough in all manner of issues.

It is no accident that David Muir begins each ABC nightly news breathless with breaking stories that put us on the edge of our seats or that national weather forecasts have become a staple of network news.

The thought of an ice storm or lightening or heavy rain captures our imagination and we will buy whatever they are advertising between stories of impending doom and disaster because they have captured us in their cycles of negativity as a principle of the spiritual life is that our minds will cling to the negative with a tenacious hold unless we take steps to break that hold..

I suspect that Mark the Gospel Story Teller picked up from Jesus that there is a lot more going on than what we feel and that in simply feeling, simply indulging and entertaining our emotions we are missing an awful lot of our lives.

I am not suggesting that feelings are bad but if all we do is feel, we deprive ourselves of a whole plethora of aspects of creation that can enrich our lives and give us inspiration to commit to being real agents of the Kingdom of God.

I had suggested last week that you initiate a candle ritual into your Advent evenings and sundowns, maybe if that is not possible or it is not working, start with just a few minutes at a time of your choosing and take note of the day as you have experienced up to and including that momentary pause.

Take some deep breaths and just look, gaze out your window blankly for 5 minutes. I know it will seem like an eternity and you will think of a million things that you need to check out but resist picking up your laptop or cellphone for just 5 minutes and after a few days you might be surprised at how you have become familiar with your minds workings in ways you never knew.

One of the most important thoughts that you may find emerging is that you are, the essential “YOU” is more than your feelings and that your assumptions about WHAT you are not but should be are not true. You might learn that what you think you are is false and the truth of yourself is “golden.”

Many people go through life believing that their deficiencies define them, that what they were told was wrong with them or, more likely, what they surmised from their environment was wrong with them is simply not true.

Living with false feelings about yourself is a particular curse of families that suffer from the disease of alcoholism or in families that carried chronic depression or

memories of suicide or sexual abuse and in these cases seeking some professional guidance is a good thing to do.

Much of the emotional baggage we carry, a lot of what we feel, is too heavy and we need to lighten our loads and sometimes we need help but by starting with just 5 minutes a day on a regular basis, we begin.