



By Pat Haggerty

When I was little, many years ago, we could only start thinking of Christmas after Thanksgiving. That was the harbinger of all things Christmas---the music, the shopping, the decorating and everything else that went with it. When the priest lit that first Advent candle on the wreath, then we knew we were on the journey. Not so today! We start planning for Christmas in October with stores bringing out their trees and wreaths; Hallmark has begun airing its holiday programs; and Christmas flyers start appearing in our mailboxes like magic.

Let's take a step back, and I don't necessarily mean in time. I mean let's take a breath and pause. Let's try to stabilize ourselves in the midst of this holiday hype and find a new strategy, so that we can find new meaning in this Advent season leading up to Christmas.

Matthew admonishes us in his gospel for the first Sunday of Advent: "Stay awake!" He also warns us: "Be prepared!" Even the Psalm response provides us with an action to follow: "Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord." It is clear, then, that we must be **doing** something. Sometimes doing is just being. We often hear the expression to "be in the moment". I propose that this state of being can be found in silence. That is not a dirty word in our vocabulary, but it is something that often causes us discomfort. We become edgy when there is silence in a conversation. We feel we must fill the void in a discussion. Can we just sit in silence with a friend?

I was thinking about some of our Advent hymns. Some of them tell us to be patient, “Patience, People” by John Dufford; some tell us to stay awake, “Stay Awake” by Christopher Walker; and some even encourage us to ready the way of the Lord as in “Ready the Way” by Bob Hurd. My favorite of all though, refers to silence: “O come, divine Messiah; the world in silence waits the day when hope shall sing its triumph and sadness flee away” (traditional French carol).

What is wrong with waiting in silence? I think everything is right about it. In silence we can find the Lord; we can seek clarity; we can reflect on what is important in our lives, especially during this holy season. We can pray for those who don’t have the leisure of silence; those who are struggling on a day to day basis; those who are facing loneliness and abandonment. Let this time of silence be a time to intensify our faith, to become open to God’s graces, and to deepen our love of him who brings us hope.

Let us resolve to etch out a time each day to devote ourselves to silence. May we find peace in the stillness of our hearts. May we find “the dawn of grace” in our longing for our Savior.