Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



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Welcome to Theologians' Corner, where each week a different woman theologian from around the world offers a fresh reflection on the Sunday readings.



First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2026

As we enter Advent, we hear a call to wakefulness and mindfulness. Jesus tells his disciples to stay awake because they do not know when the house owner will return (Mark 13:33-37). At first, this may sound like a warning against being caught unawares and unprepared. However, there may be something deeper here.

We need to explore further and ask some questions. What does it mean to stay awake? And what kind of relationship are we being invited to sustain as we await the coming of Christ? The readings offer us some interesting points of departure.

In the first reading, Isaiah gives voice to a people who seem to have lost their way (63:16b-17; 19b; 64:2-7). They recognize they have wandered away from God and are now experiencing the consequences of their estrangement. Their lament is deeply moving: "Why, Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so that we fear you not?"

There is something almost comical and childlike, if not downright childish, about this complaint. It brings to mind the relationship between a parent and an infant.

Picture a baby being held tenderly in the arms of a loving parent. The baby wriggles and struggles, and eventually slips out of the parent's embrace. It crawls away and ventures into unsafe places. It soils itself and becomes uncomfortable. The parent does not rush after the baby to grab it at every turn. The child is allowed room to explore. Yet the parent's loving attention never departs the child, even for a moment.

Sooner or later, the baby begins to cry. They cannot understand why things have come to this, or why they are no longer as comfortable as they were in the parent's arms. The child may even blame the parent for the discomfort it has brought upon itself.

Is this not sometimes our own experience of God? We enjoy the freedom to make our own decisions, pursue our goals and follow our preferred paths. We may even become so engrossed in our pursuits that we gradually lose our sense of connection with God. Then, when things become really difficult, we wonder why God seems distant. We cry out, asking why we have been left to stray from the ways that once kept us secure.

Yet Isaiah's prayer reminds us of something important and consoling: God remains our Mother, our Father, our Redeemer. Our relationship with God is not founded on our ability to get everything right. Rather, it rests on a love that continues to hold us, even when we wander off.

This brings us to Paul's message (1 Corinthians 1:3-9). Paul gives thanks for the grace of God bestowed on the Christian community through Christ Jesus. He speaks of the many ways in which they have been enriched: in speech, knowledge and spiritual gifts.

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We sometimes speak of the different "graces" of God. However, I must admit, I flinch when I hear that because I understand grace differently. We can identify and name particular gifts and talents we have received from God. Nevertheless, grace itself cannot be counted nor measured. It is a continuum. It is a state of relationship. Grace is the Divine Life dwelling within us. It is God's superabundant presence within us; continually enriching, sustaining and strengthening us.

As such, grace is not simply something God gives us occasionally. We certainly do not earn it. Neither is it heaped nor banked, as some people might have been erroneously taught. Grace is God's free gift to us. Grace is not some*thing*. It is Some *one*. It is God's own self in us. It is the sustaining reality of our relationship with God.

Paul assures the Corinthians that God will strengthen them to the end. This is important. Our capacity to remain faithful does not depend entirely on our own strength, effort or determination. We need grace to keep us steady, connected and responsive to God.

I think this might be what it means to stay awake. It is not merely to remain alert for some unexpected event in the future. It is to remain connected and attentive to the relationship that sustains us now. It is to recognize God's presence, appreciate the gifts we have received, and allow grace to shape the way we live.

Jesus' warning in the Gospel is therefore not an invitation to live in fear. It is a call to live consciously and responsibly in the continual awareness of the divine embrace.

The householder has entrusted the house to the servants, each with a task to perform. Staying awake means being faithful to that responsibility. It means refusing to become so distracted by the routine of everyday life that we forget what has been entrusted to us.

Advent invites us to reflect on the three comings of Christ: Christ's coming among us in human history; Christ's continual coming into our lives and communities daily; and Christ's final coming that we await.

Are we attentive enough to recognize Christ when he comes, and whichever way he comes? Do we notice the people around us whose dignity is being trampled, the vulnerable who need protection, the lonely who need our presence, and those whose cries seek justice?

And when we notice or hear, do we do something, or do we look away and walk away? Are we using the gifts and opportunities God has given us to make life more bearable and meaningful for others?

As we begin another Advent, let us ask God to strengthen our will to do good. May we not wriggle away from the embrace of grace, only to discover that we have lost our sense of direction.

May we remain awake, well grounded in God's unfailing love, and ready to welcome Christ whenever and wherever he comes.

This story appears in the **Theologians' Corner** feature series. View the full series.