

**A PASTORAL LETTER
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER
For the First Sunday of Advent 2023**



**APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN
THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 3rd December 2023**

My dear people,

Stay awake! What an appropriate way for me to address you as you settle back to listen to this Advent Pastoral Letter! Of course, these words come from the Lord Himself, and are addressed to each of us. How are we to understand this command He makes to His disciples? Let me ask you three more questions. What happens when we stay awake but let our Faith sleep? What consequences can we expect when we let our Charity sleep? What suffers when our Hope in Christ is dormant? See how we can be awake to all the joys and sorrows of this world, but live our lives as if Jesus never came, never spoke, and never taught us. We will live as if He never gave us His peace, joy, forgiveness, love or the gift of Himself or the gift of the Holy Spirit.

To let Faith, Hope and Charity sleep leaves us with nothing more than what this passing world has to offer. It leaves us with nothing more than 'chance-charity', random fortune and hope founded on nothing more than our own efforts. Something deep in every human heart will not accept this and refuses to be satisfied by what will not last.

When Faith sleeps society will be at liberty to re-design life, including human life. God-given truths will be lost sight of, and truth itself will be redefined in order to serve lesser purposes. The way of the Good Shepherd will not be known, so other ways will have to be created leading to other goals set by other people. Life itself will be measured by arbitrary values that are themselves constantly being changed.

Stay awake! Our Lord addresses these words to your Faith, your Hope and your Charity. Keep them nourished on the Gospel, the living Word of God. Keep them refreshed by meeting Christ regularly in the Mass where we are joined to the Body of Christ and saved from the dangers of isolation. When Faith, Hope and Charity are

awake and alert we can recognise Jesus as our Messiah. We can understand the place of trials, suffering, disappointment and even failure, and still retain Hope because it is not built on our own effort or what is mundane; it is built on the Divine.

You already know that the purpose of Advent is to prepare us to celebrate the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. You know of His first coming, in the womb of Mary, nine months before His birth in Bethlehem. You know of His Second Coming at the end of time, when He will come to judge the living and the dead. You also know how He comes to each of us in these days, in ways that are personal, profound, and miraculous. A wide-awake Faith tells us that His coming – in whatever way – is always and intervention of the Divine into the temporal, utterly of God, out of love for sinners. It tells us that the Lord has not given up on us but sees something in us we often do not see ourselves.

Stay awake! These words are for you because you must stay awake for the good of others. You are asked to keep Faith for the good of those who have lost theirs. You must be hopeful for others who can see no reason for hope. You must live charity, particularly where it is not yet known and not welcomed. Thus, those who are awake to the things of this created order may catch their first glimpse of the Creator, who made all things not out of nothing, but out of love.

There are those in society who must work when others sleep. Perhaps some of you listening to this Pastoral Letter are among them. Such work seems to put you out of step with others. It can be the same for us, we may appear out of step with many around us. But the work is important, the shift must be done, and Christ call us to it. As we begin this new Advent, let us remember with gratitude what Christ has done for love of us. His promise of eternal happiness still holds good, and even begins to spill over into this life. How? By keeping awake your Faith, your Hope, and your Charity.

With my blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul Swarbrick." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster