

Advent is a time of waiting. But the deeper question is this: *How is God calling us to use this time?* Our experience of time varies depending on the state of our hearts. When we are bored, time seems to stand still. When we are enjoying ourselves, it passes too quickly. When we want to avoid making a decision, we push it off—“I’ll deal with that tomorrow.” But sometimes tomorrow never comes, and suddenly it is too late.

Scientifically, of course, time always moves at the same speed. But spiritually, time works differently. God measures time by the opportunities He gives us to receive His grace. Moments become decisive not because the seconds tick differently, but because God breaks into them. Grace interrupts. Mercy intrudes. Revelation surprises. And because God’s grace is continually “breaking into time,” He is always present to us.

This is why both St. Paul and Jesus teach the same Advent truth: *God’s decisive hour is always now.* Paul tells us, “It is the hour now for you to wake from sleep.” Jesus tells us that the Son of Man will come “at an hour you do not expect.” In Scripture, “the hour” is never a measurement on a clock. It is a moment pregnant with God’s action—an invitation that demands response.

Fr. Simeon, the Trappist monk and Scripture scholar, captures Advent perfectly when he asks: *“Do I believe in the possibility of something wholly unexpected and transcendental suddenly entering the scene of my life and*

forever changing (my) destiny and that of the whole world?”[1] Advent is meant to awaken that belief again. God is not distant. He is not passive.

Jesus uses a startling image today: He compares the coming of God to a thief in the night. It is important to understand what He means—and what He does *not* mean. When Jesus says God comes “like a thief,” He uses the Greek word **κλέπτης (kleptēs)**—not to describe God’s character, but the *manner* of His approach. A *kleptēs* is a thief who comes quietly and unexpectedly, slipping in without force or violence. This is very different from the other New Testament word for “thief,” **ληστής (lēstēs)**—a violent bandit who attacks the traveler in the Good Samaritan parable and the word Jesus uses in Gethsemane when He asks, “Have you come out as against a *lēstēs* to arrest me?”

God is never a *lēstēs*. He does not storm in or coerce. He moves with a kind of divine stealth. He slips into the ordinary moments of our lives—our routines, our struggles, even our distractions—long before we notice. He steals into our hearts to awaken us, to stir conversion, to plant a grace we did not see coming. He comes not to take what is ours but to give what we would never think to ask for: mercy, illumination, and the grace to begin again. And so Jesus urges vigilance, because the quiet footsteps of the Divine *Kleptēs* can be heard only by a heart awake and attentive.

The “thief” metaphor is pastoral, not punitive. Jesus is telling us: *Be ready, because God comes when you least expect Him*. Not only at the end of time but also in the countless, hidden moments within time—moments of grace, conversion, and encounter.

This is why Fr. Simeon can say, “Practically speaking, the time of His coming is always now.”[2]

Time takes on a very different meaning when something unexpected crashes into our lives. A diagnosis, a job loss, a betrayal, or the death of someone we love—suddenly time seems to stand still. We feel unprepared. The world tilts. Scripture names such moments κρίσις (krisis)—not only crises in the modern sense of disruption, but moments of *judgment, decision, and revelation*.

And yet even in these moments of *krisis*, God is present. In fact, they are often the times when He draws closest—sneaking into our hearts like a *kleptēs* to awaken us, to heal what has been wounded, or to redirect our lives toward His will. What feels like crisis is often God’s decisive hour, His gentle breaking-in, offering us the grace to see our lives more truthfully and to begin again.

Advent invites us to become sensitive to these divine intrusions—to live awake, alert, watchful. God’s visits are rarely loud. They usually come quietly: through a nudge of conscience, an unexpected consolation in prayer, an act of kindness that breaks open our defenses, a Scripture

passage that pierces the heart, or even a difficulty that draws us into deeper trust.

The question is not whether God is coming. He is. The question is whether we are awake when He arrives. Advent is a season to tune the heart, to sharpen spiritual attention, to notice the ways God sneaks into our lives. Every moment—ordinary or extraordinary—can become a divine hour, charged with grace, if we remain vigilant.

The more sensitive we become to these quiet comings of God now, the more prepared we will be for the final, decisive coming of Christ. Our hearts learn not to fear His approach but to welcome it. This is why St. Thérèse of Lisieux could say with such disarming joy, even as she suffered from tuberculosis: *“It is said in the Gospel that God will come like a Thief. He will come to steal me away very gently. Oh, how I’d love to aid the Thief! ... I’m not afraid of the Thief. I see him in the distance, and I take good care not to call out: ‘Help! Thief!’ On the contrary, I call to him, saying: ‘Over here! Over here!’”***[3]**

This is the grace of Advent: to live in such constant awareness of God’s quiet comings now that when He comes at last in glory, our response will be like that of St. Therese of Liseux—not fear but eager anticipation; not anxiety but joy; not resistance but the deepest longing of the heart. For the coming we await most is eternal life with Jesus—our Divine Thief—who comes not to take, but to bring us home.

[1] Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*, vol. 3, *Meditations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapters 19–25* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 738.

[2] Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*, vol. 3, *Meditations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapters 19–25* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 739.

[3] St. Thérèse of Lisieux, quoted in Peter John Cameron, *To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Spiritual Reflections on the Sunday Gospels, Cycle A* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2001), 22.