

I want to say just three things today, and I want to try my level best to do it clearly, profoundly, and I hope even quickly on this first Sunday of Advent in the year of our Lord 2020.

First, I want to say a word about what I'll call "secular sleepiness," which is all about refusing to wake-up to what is REAL – in other words, the bigger, eternal picture. And nobody is immune. It turns out that Sleepy isn't just one of the Seven Dwarfs.

Then I want to make a comment about how things REALLY are, not as they seem to be, but how God sees right through it....right down to how he sees you and me – how he understands our personal longings and frustrations – how he He sees our strivings to be seen positively by others at a level not even our best friend or spouse (or dog) does. And finally I want to make a final observation about a fairly new You tube phenomenon my fifth-grade daughter Camille introduced to me last week.

Let me start this way. Have you ever fallen, let's say, half-asleep and found yourself semi-aware that you were enjoying a good dream? This is precisely what happens to us after Thanksgiving lunch as the pancreas goes into shock trying to manage the carbs. We know it's not quite reality – it's like twilight sedation, but it seems pleasing enough, so we run with it until the food coma is over.

An article in *Very Well Mind* claims the worst kind of sleep scenario involves being suddenly awakened by dreams involving one of three things: falling off a cliff suddenly, being naked in public, or being chased. I guess that means the ultimate sleep disaster would involve waking up from a dream about being chased naked off a cliff! I haven't had that one yet.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we've all had what we thought was a good night's sleep – some deep REM sleep – when we felt transported somewhere “over the rainbow,” to a place of “sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows” (Leslie Gore).

Both kinds of sleep, however – whether it's dreaming of “sugar plums dancing” in my head or a nightmare about being naked in public – are less than real, and they often end suddenly and shockingly.

A few years ago I remember falling asleep while watching Food Network, and I can remember dreaming about a great meal with friends in my favorite bistro in Paris. Gordon Ramsey was our waiter! Yes, I know he's British, not French, and a chef, not a waiter. But, it was a dream, okay?

Just as we were beginning our entrees at Amis Louis – veal chops with a mushroom sauce, actually – I was suddenly, sadly, and shockingly brought

back around to a very different reality, because the sound of what I thought was the tableside cognac flambee was actually our dog, Duper, vomiting on the comforter right here in Sarasota. May I just say it is one thing to wake up and realize you're not in Paris, but it's twice as bad to be betrayed by man's best friend!

Let me stop beating around the bush. Much of what you and I think is most real, most important, is less than real – and certainly far short of ultimate. Much of what we toil and sweat about – a lot of what runs through our heads and hearts every single day – is the result of being lulled into a spiritual sleep by a sad addiction to what the world says matters most. And this secular sleepiness closes our eyes to the real picture – the bigger spiritual, and eternal picture. And it makes us do all sorts of crazy things!

News flash: most of us – each of us in certain situations – act like this world is all there is. Many of us act like the most important part of December is executing the perfect Christmas dinner, finding the perfect Christmas tree with the perfect ornaments, buying the perfect gifts on Cyber Monday for imperfect people, and staging the perfect pictures on Instagram. Those aren't bad things at all, but they are hardly what is most real. They are temporal. They are fleeting. They are not eternal. And they

certainly can't save us from our sins or deliver us from the very real, emotional soars we carry around.

Do you remember Screwtape, the senior demon in Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*? His job was to teach a junior demon, Wormwood, how to guide the main character away from God and towards the Devil. He told him: Your business is to fix his attention on the stream [of immediate sense experiences – in other words, only what we can see, and touch, and hear]. Teach him to call it “real life,” and don't let him ask what he means by “real.”

But, here's the real truth – the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The world is stumbling around half-asleep, “looking for love in all the wrong places” totally unaware of what is real and what really is to come.

One day, the Judge of the Nations will return, and He's not coming to judge us based on the quality of our eggnog recipes, our little league trophies, and the time we won citizen of the year – the only three times we measured up enough to impress somebody and still have documentation of achievement.

He is coming to rescue those who discovered the world never was quite enough – those who never fell asleep to their greatest needs – those things most real and eternal – His mercy, His forgiveness, and His grace.

My fifth-grade daughter, Camille, loves YouTube. What fifth-grader doesn't? When I was a fifth-grade boy, I used to ask my dad to watch Arnold Schwarzenegger films with me on worn-out VHS tapes. This week she asked me to watch an “unboxing” video with her. Do you know about this genre? It turns out that last year alone 6 1/2 years' worth of unboxing footage was uploaded to YouTube, and some of the videos have been seen more than 50 million times.^[1]

If you're uninitiated like I was, this is how it works. A new shiny product or gadget gets released – like an iPhone or some really in-demand collectible – and someone orders it so he or she can be among the first to own it.

And when Amazon drops it off, your camera is rolling, filming the package being opened, being “unboxed.” It sounds completely ludicrous, doesn't it? I thought so, too, until I watched a few with Camille. Hey, don't knock it til' you try it.

It is hard to describe the joy of watching an excited, expectant child open a mystery box, pull the bubble wrap back, peek in and start smiling ear to ear and shouting as he discovers his dream collectible lego awaits inside. These videos can make even the most committed Scrooge or Grinch crack a smile.

How much more, then, will it be for us on that great day, if we stay awake, waiting – longing – for His return in glory?

In the final analysis Curtis Mayfield - from the Impressions – in 1965 was right:

People get ready, there's a train comin'
You don't need no baggage, you just get on board
All you need is faith to hear the diesels hummin'
You don't need no ticket you just thank the lord

Jesus said, “And what I say to you I say to all: stay awake.”