*To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens! As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt. Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.* Psalm 123

*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say:* *“There is peace and security,” then* *sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So, then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober, for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.* 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

*One day shortly after the birth of their new baby, the mother had to go out to do some errands. So, the proud dad stayed home to watch his new son.*

*Soon after the mother left, the baby started to cry. The father did everything he could think of to do but the baby wouldn’t stop crying. Finally, the dad got so worried he decided to take the baby to the doctor.*

*After the doctor listened to the father all that he had done to get the baby to stop crying, the doctor began to examine the baby’s ears, chest and then down to the diaper area. When he undid the diaper, he found that the diaper is indeed full.*

*"Here’s the problem," the Dr. said: "He needs a change."*

*The father was very perplexed: "But the diaper package says it is good for up to 10 lbs."*

Be Ready!

1. As we continue reading Paul’s letter to Thessalonians, let us once again focus on the promise given by Jesus and carried through the centuries by His Church. This promise is one of the eternal life through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. This promise reminds us that another one, the one to send the Messiah who would save the world goes much further in time, to the days of the Garden of Eden. God made a promise to Adam and Eve that one day the Savior will come. In just two weeks once again we will begin the Christmas Season and will start our celebrations with the First Sunday of Advent. It is imperative to realize that as we celebrate Advent and eventually Christmas every year, we commemorate the events that took place two millennia ago in the small obscure Judean village called Bethlehem. While writing to Thessalonians, Paul reminds the Church there that as the promise of the Messiah’s coming has been fulfilled by God, so will also the promise made by Jesus be fulfilled.

2. I would like to share with you today some of my reflections as I worked on this message. T reflections were, to a certain degree, influenced by the sermon I once read. In that sermon the preacher used the phrase *“the Ultimate Advent,”* one that is still to come. As Christians, we believe the ultimate goal of the history to be the eternal existence, with and in the place, Jesus promised to prepare for us. We may speculate as to what this place might be, but we are certain that there is such a place. When I look at the history of the world I sometimes wonder, is the history like the circular treadmill the hamster spins around while going nowhere, or is it a linear process leading to a certain place. If we reject God and His presence and influence in our lives, we are indeed moving like a hamster in his wheal, but with Jesus and His influence, we move forward, toward the ultimate goal, the eternal life. With Jesus we have the assurance of moving toward God’s designed and defined time of completion, namely the Heavenly Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the *“Ultimate Kingdom,”* but we must also realize that this Kingdom will come following the *“Ultimate Advent.”* The annual celebration of Advent which in our calendars will begin on December 3 this year, is a part of our Christmas tradition, but the Ultimate Advent Paul writes about, will bring the everlasting presence of the Lord.

3. Have we, however, given any thought as to why we celebrate the Advent every year? Why do we also celebrate other holidays such as Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, just to name a few? What are all these holidays about? Following the *“Common Lectionary,”* every year the First Sunday of Advent begins a new *“Church Year,”* but that Sunday is not necessarily the beginning of the series of all of these events, but it is also the end of the series of them. In all those celebrations we are very much aware of the past, but we should also be aware of the fact that we are still waiting for the *“Ultimate Advent”* of Christ. Paul writes: *“you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come* *like a thief in the night,”* and I believe he echoes the words of Jesus who said: *“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* Do you remember the story of Noah? Nobody paid any attention to Noah’s warnings and when the time came, no one but Noah and his family were prepared to face the calamity of the flood. That story always reminds me of a joke: *During a flood a local preacher sought safety on a roof of the church. A boat came by and tried to save him, but he said: "no thank you, God will save me." A rescue chopper came trying to save him too, but he said: "no thank you, God will save me." Consequently, he unfortunately drowned. When he got to heaven he complained to God: "why didn't you save me?" and God answered: "I sent you a boat and a chopper, big dummy!"*

4. Nothing has changed with the humanity ever since the days of Noah. People are working, keeping busy, going about their daily business. As the society, we believe to be in control of everything and we believe, just as Paul writes: *“There is peace and security.”* Just as the people of Judea were when Jesus was born. When He was born, the people were also busy carrying their daily tasks. Would the angels not come to the shepherds, all people, with the exception of the three particular men from the East, would miss His coming to this world completely, and yet, they had all the signs. They had the Scriptures with the prophecies describing the coming and a place where the Messiah was to be born. As indicated by Matthew, the priests knew about the place, the signs, and yet, they were not ready, being too busy pursuing their religious rites. When the angels appeared to the shepherds, the Gospel’s narrative indicates that these men also knew, just as every Jew did, about the Messiah to be born, yet they needed the angel’s prompt, otherwise they would miss Jesus’ birth. Only when prompted, they went to check on what they heard. Today just as the past, to find the Messiah requires special consideration, and is, just as it was then a matter of choice. Does this not sound familiar today? To find Christ requires special effort, and not because He is unwilling to reveal Himself, but because we are too busy, looking for everything but Jesus Christ. Only some people noticed Jesus’ birth then, and only some notice Him today. As the society in general, Americans turned their backs on God and the Savior, and this is painful, but unmistaken truth.

5. The greatest tragedy of our days is that many people are not even aware of His presence. Sure, for the past month or so a number of television stations run the Christmas movies, but 99% of all these films present Christmas as the time of the family gatherings, Santa and his toys for children, or the *“Christmas Tree”* decorating traditions. In many cases there is also some form of a *“love story”* inserted into the celebration of Christmas. There is however no mentioning of God and the Savior anymore. And here, writing to Thessalonians, Paul warns that the *“sudden destruction will come,”* and he adds it will come as surely *“as the labor pains come upon a pregnant woman,”* and there will be no escape!We might be so caught up with our life that we forget about the quiet, humble and dramatic revelation of Jesus’ birth, what followed His birth, and what will surely yet to come. Today, some people miss Christ because they don’t bother to watch for Him, or because they don’t have any expectations. The routine of life has put many people *“to sleep”* and dulled their senses. The strangest however is that there are people who miss Christ although they seek Him diligently, but they look so hard, that they cannot see the subtle ways in which He comes.

6. The Scriptures remind us that we have to watch for Christ in the ordinary people and the ordinary events, not only in something *“grandiose.”* Using the analogy of a thief in the night, the Bible makes us all aware not only of the certainty of Christ’s coming, but also of the importance of watching for Him with all of our senses, just so we may be able to discover Him when He comes. And come He will! Even today, Jesus comes in the ordinary, in eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, working in the field or in the office, in grinding at the mill or the factory, in the rush of the restaurant kitchen, at the birth of the baby, or everydayness of our lives. Unless we watch for Him, we will miss Him. As His Church we have the knowledge, as Paul writes. We know, but there is a danger of this knowledge to become routine, as it was for the people of Jesus’ birth days, and this danger is very much alive and well today. The reality is that we like the routine, we prefer not to be surprised, and there is nothing wrong with routine, except, the routine might lead to carelessness. Many accidents happen because of the routine in our lives. Experts say that most of the car accidents happens within a mile from our homes. I believe this is true, because the areas where we live are so well known to us that we loosen our attention in those familiar surroundings.

7. In the real life we might, and we do, encounter times when for the brief moment, even as we ponder God’s mercy and His love, we do not pay attention to what is happening around, and this is why the Scriptures so often *“keep us on our toes”* with messages similar to what Paul writes here. We need to watch constantly, not only for the part of the day, of the week, of the month or of the year. We must watch for Christ in everything around, in the people we meet, in the celebrations we hold, in business of daily routines. In the preparations for the special events and holidays, in the busyness of Advent, Christmas, Easter and many others. In everything we experience, we must be ready to discover His presence and in the least obvious ways, or in the most unexpected places. Let us look with the eyes of the expectation and with the ears of hope. Watch! Be ready, for one day He will come, just as He promised, and remember, He always keeps His promises.