

1st Sunday of Advent

[Adam DeLeon](#)

Lectionary 1:

Isa 2:1-5

Ps 122: 1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Rom 13:11-14

Matt 24:37-44

Possible preaching themes:

- **On the images of sleep and staying awake** from the second reading and gospel:
the human body requires sleep to function properly, but we can be trained in various ways to “stay awake” even when we would rather shut down
- **The Fear of and preparing for the unexpected:** together the readings speak about an unexpected future, which could be a source of fear; preparing for the unexpected can also be a source of consolation and hope

Possible scientific resources:

- **On sleep and staying awake:**
 - “Cognitive benefits of sleep and their loss due to sleep deprivation;” this article explores sleep deprivation among medical residents, and the importance of sleep for healthy cognitive functioning <https://n.neurology.org/content/64/7/E25.full>
 - “Teenagers and Sleep: How much sleep is enough?” Evidence suggests that teens need more sleep than they needed at age 10 <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-andprevention/teenagers-and-sleep-how-much-sleep-is-enough>
 - “Sleep and Health;” This very accessible article punctuated by short videos explores the importance of sleep for our physical and mental wellbeing <https://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/need-sleep/whats-in-it-for-you/health>
 - “The effects of basic military training on shooting tasks in conditions of sleep deprivation;” This study of training special operation forces notes the detrimental effects of sleep deprivation on performance, but also shows how some training can have a positive impact on this condition <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Goran->

[Sporis/publication/232321635 The effects of basic military training on shooting tasks in conditions of sleep deprivation/links/0fcfd5082438e0f183000000/The-effects-of-basic-military-training-on-shooting-tasks-in-conditions-of-sleep-deprivation.pdf](https://www.sporis.com/publication/232321635/The-effects-of-basic-military-training-on-shooting-tasks-in-conditions-of-sleep-deprivation/links/0fcfd5082438e0f183000000/The-effects-of-basic-military-training-on-shooting-tasks-in-conditions-of-sleep-deprivation.pdf)

- **The Power of the unexpected** ○ “Understanding and Overcoming the fear of the Unknown;” an accessible overview of understand the fear of the unknown [xenophobia] and providing ways to overcome such fears <https://www.healthline.com/health/understanding-and-overcoming-fear-of-the-unknown#takeaway>
- “The New Anxiety Therapy that’s all about Accepting your Fears;” acceptance and commitment therapy centers on accepting that pain and suffering are an inevitable part of life <https://elemental.medium.com/the-new-anxiety-therapy-thats-all-about-accepting-your-fears-2bb03f257a36>
- “Creativity and the unknown;” stepping outside of what we know into the unknown is part of a true creative process https://ryuc.info/common/creativity_perspective/creativity_and_unknown.htm
- “Trevor Ragan: how to overcome fear;” A TED talk by the founder of the learner lab https://www.ted.com/talks/trevor_ragan_how_to_overcome_fear

Homily outline: Wake Up and Be Prepared

- **We need sleep**
- Sleeping is not only important for health, but also essential for survival • Decades of research has demonstrated multiple benefits of sleep:
 - it can improve our neural processing, including Insight formation, novel-language perception, visual discrimination and even motor skills <https://n.neurology.org/content/64/7/E25.full>
 - Besides “thinking” healthy sleep patterns can boost our immune system, help prevent weight gain, strengthen our heart, and increase productivity <https://www.sclhealth.org/blog/2018/09/the-benefits-of-getting-a-full-night-sleep/>
- The lack of sleep has many negative effects ○ It Impairs cognitive and behavioral performance
 - It makes us moody ○ Increases our risk of accidents,
 - Increases our risks for high blood pressure and diabetes <https://www.healthline.com/health/sleep-deprivation/effects-onbody>

- **Fighting drowsiness** ○ For many the answer to drowsiness is a jolt of coffee or some other chemical to combat the sleepiness
 - these can have negative effects, e.g., altering the normal stages of sleep, decreasing the quality of sleep, etc.
- There are healthy ways to take the edge of sleepiness, e.g.,
 - Get up and move around
 - Eat a healthy snack to boost energy
 - Start a conversation to wake up your mind

<https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/natural-tipssleepiness>
- Some groups even train specifically to function effectively in times of sleep deprivation
 - Some programs used by the military have a positive impact on reduction of sleep deprivation during different tasks
 - Such programs helped groups develop higher tolerance to the psychological stress developed during training and its sleep deprivation

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Goran-Sporis/publication/232321635/The_effects_of_basic_military_training_on_shooting_tasks_in_conditions_of_sleep_deprivation/links/0fcfd5082438e0f183000000/The-effects-of-basic-military-training-onshooting-tasks-in-conditions-of-sleep-deprivation.pdf
- **Staying awake during Advent** ○ This is a busy season in multiple ways as the December rush descends
 - Students are studying overtime for final papers and exams
 - Families are preparing for various gatherings and commitments
 - Business are ramping up post-Thanksgiving sale efforts
 - Postal workers and delivery personnel are in overdrive mode
- For many in the northern hemisphere
 - Diminishing sunlight
 - Dropping temperatures
 - May heighten our instincts for comfort, withdrawal, and sleep
- Advent is an antidote to our spiritual drowsiness
 - Some people even consider advent a kind of “boot camp,” that can help build up tolerance for all sorts of spiritual sleepiness and lethargy
- We do not “stay awake” just for our own sake, but for the sake of the community
 - There are many folks that do not register on our radar
 - Marginalized by economic status or race
 - People who do not share our religious or political views
 - We are spiritually asleep to them

- Then there are folk who actually are sleep deprived
 - Because as a single parent they work 2 jobs and raise 3 kids
 - they are caring for elderly parents or disabled siblings
 - they work in health care and are physically and mentally depleted because of their service to others
- Advent is practice time for staying awake, for paying attention, for reaching out to and lifting up those who on their own might drop from emotional, spiritual, or physical exhaustion
- Jesus was unusually gifted at “staying awake”
- He literally spent nights in prayer, like before calling his chosen disciples (Luke 6:12)
- His agony in the garden of Gethsemane was another prayer marathon, in which he clearly outlasted his disciples who kept falling asleep while he struggled with his approaching death (Matt 26:36-46)
- More than that he was consistently “awake” and attentive to those whom others ignored: Samaritan women, lepers, Syrophoenician women, crucified companions
- These were welcomed by him into God’s reign
- Advent does not simply prepare us for a past event, i.e. the birth of Jesus, which happened thousands of years ago
- It prepares us to take up again the mystery of incarnation, to be Christ’s body in the world (1 Cor 12: 27), and to enable the birthing of Christ’s love to continue in the world
- It is time to get serious about Advent as a spiritual boot camp and build up our capacities and gifts for staying awake for the Christ who looms around every corner and is the promise and challenge of every person we meet.

Tags: Advent, deprivation, health, medicine, sleep

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way’s sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.