

- Gifts which return to thee in Thanksgiving for thy manifold and great mercies, realizing that thy loving hand hath given us all that we possess. grant that we may always be faithful stewards of thy bounty, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, amen. (quiet shuffling)

- Grace be unto you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. you know what time it is? it is full time now, for you to wake from sleep. for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. I first remember hearing these words when I was present with several hundred college students in a required chapel service on a small church related college campus. now those of you here who have never had the great privilege of being required to attend chapel on a small church related college campus, have missed a great experience and worship. I too, was a student who went rather reluctantly to the chapel on a dreary Monday morning. the first day of school, following the Thanksgiving recess. having no knowledge then of the church calendar and caring less, I was completely unaware that this day fell in the first week of advent. I only knew that I had been riding a greyhound bus all night in order to make an eight o'clock class that morning. And I had met two classes and now with the 10 o'clock hour, I was ready to settle in for a much needed nap. The organist very kindly played a lullaby type prelude, and then the president of the college in a booming voice over a much too loud public address system read the opening scripture sentences taken from the epistle, so for the first Sunday in advent, and I, and my dozing neighbors were startled to hear, "It is full time now for you to wake from sleep for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believe." now I have yet to be convinced that these words of Saint Paul, were not addressed to me personally. and now some 18 years later I still hear them as some personal address, calling me by name and inquiring about my state of dormancy. I am the Friar Jacques to whom is asked "Dormez vous," I am the Brother, John, and at least once a year on this first Sunday in advent I hear the question, Brother John, Are you sleeping? and so in the light of this lesson, from the epistle to the Romans, I turn to you and ask the same question "Dormez Vous?" our immediate response I think is to look upon ourselves as anything but sleeping, but rather wide awake persons for we are the man of the 20th century the participants in the new awakening living in a world, come of age. we may justly be accused of many sins, but certainly not that of sleeping. and yet I wonder in my house, we live by certain little ground rules. most of which I did not make. one of them is this: that no adult is allowed to fall asleep watching television. now, those of you who have been sampling the fair of this year, realize what a difficult rule this is to live by. no matter how sleepy one is, or how dreary the program, the commandment remains thou shall not fall asleep before the television set. now for 12 years, I have been working on a way to catch a little nap during the Sunday afternoon professional football game. I brace myself in chair, lean back my head and doze and when on the outer limits of my auditory consciousness I hear footsteps approach, I fling open my eyelids, look straight ahead and prepare myself for the inevitable question. "Are you asleep?" to which I answer, "No, I'm not asleep. the score is 32 to 19." I have managed to escape on a few occasions but not too long ago, I was caught by the reply "How could you know the score? I turned the TV off 30 minutes ago." (laughter) this may very well be our situation in this enlightened age. We no longer live in a world of myth and superstition. We are a mature people of people according to Bonhoeffer for whom God is no longer a necessary hypothesis. We deal daily

with the problems, grace and revolution. We have replaced our puritan and ethical codes with the responsible love and the existential situation. we're on the verge of abolishing poverty and unwanted pregnancies. and we live in a world which is ruled out war. that is just as soon as we clear up this little mess in Vietnam and the other one on the Jordan-Israeli border. we live in a world in which we intend to live in law and peace. we no longer fight urbanization and secularization but we welcome as the promise new age, which may soon usher in the kingdom itself. our scientific knowledge, our technical skills are bursting, with the possibility of abundant life for all mankind. The great society is upon us, and it's a probability. are we asleep? of course not. we know the score. How much of this sounds so similar to the slogans of the 1920s when following the war to end all wars we would rise each morning and look in the mirror and say every day in every way, "I'm getting better and better." and believe it. And do you remember four or five years ago at the most? how worried and concerned we were about the church that the church was irrelevant. it was not dealing with social issues it was captive to suburbanite, middle class mentality and that we were hopelessly divided and the body of Christ was badly broken. and that this was the scandal of Christendom and that the church as an institution was dead. but I no longer hear these accusations indeed I no longer make them. I now find that I'm going from campus to campus from church to church, proclaiming the Church is being renewed. the Church is being renewed, I cry out. look around you and see what is happening in the church. ministers are marching in the streets witnessing the churches at work in the inner city. again, priests are performing in nightclubs and unity. a man you have never seen such a ecumenism. Vatican two has opened up avenues, never believed possible. the council on church union has agreed on preliminary working papers. and the Methodist church has ushered in the new day by uniting with the evangelical United brethren to form the largest Protestant communion in America. and so the question comes to the church. "Are you asleep?" and we answer, "no we're not asleep. we know what the score is" how similar this sounds to the 1920 optimism in the church when we could boldly proclaim and believe the evangelization of the world in our generation. and we sang its theme song, you win the one next to you and I'll win the one next to me. and in no time at all we'll have them all and win them one by one. do you know what time it is? it is full time to wake out of sleep. is this word of Paul to the church drawn a word to us in our day? or do we really believe that we are wide awake? this is not to say that things are not happening in the church and in the world. if one wants to go where the action is there are plenty of floating crap games around and this is an exciting time to be a part of the church no doubt. but perhaps, just perhaps perhaps we do not have the real answer to our situation. perhaps we are not even close. maybe we are not awake to what is happening at all. when I was a boy, I shared a room with three of my brothers. there were nights when I did not sleep well. and during these waking hours I observed a strange phenomenon. one of my brothers would cry out in his sleep and another one would answer. and for five or 10 minutes at a time they would carry on a conversation, yet both were asleep. this was dialogue. and it may be descriptive of the dialogue now being carried on between the church and the world. we may be having a conversation. but perhaps when we wake up, we may discover that we didn't know what we were talking about and that no communication has really taken place, because we were both asleep. advent is the season of the year that, that bothers me. oh, it doesn't bother me. that Christmas has become commercialized. I actually worry about the people who run around worrying about Christmas, becoming commercialized. I heard recently of a department store a department store that said shop at the store which keeps Christ in Christmas. see our huge nativity scene on the ground floor (laughter) and in pulpits all over America today on this first Sunday of Advent, ministers are crying out about the commercialization of this holy season. what am I bothered that on a college and

university campuses that we can't keep advent as a penitential season. looking forward to the celebration of the birth of Christ. if we celebrate Christmas on campus at all, we must squeeze it in between the Thanksgiving and Christmas recesses, for God knows that there is no time for Christmas when we come back preparing for exam. what bothers me really about advent is this. just when I think that we've got a good thing going, just when I've worked out the the proper system and related in my own mind belief and action and theology and ethics and the church and the world. and it is at this point every year that advent comes and I am reminded of the incarnation that God broke into history over 1900 years ago in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. and I have to deal with this event. I cannot ignore it. oh I can accept it, and often do from year to year with all of its mythological trappings and become right, pious and sentimental about it all. I light my advent candles and glow right along with them. or on occasions I I can muster up the courage to reject the whole thing altogether as not really being relevant to the system that I've worked out in my own mind. but one thing I cannot do I cannot make it fit into my scheme of things. for it is a reminder, always a reminder, that God is at work in the world in a way which I do not readily comprehend. Alfred Tennyson expressed it some years ago and we sang it as a little noticed fourth stanza of a familiar hymn and he said, our little systems have their day. they have their day and cease to be. they are, but broken lights of thee and thou oh Lord art more than they. and this in a sense is what the Christian Church proclaims that advent had been. that 1,970 years ago were there about that the Roman world had a lot going for it that Judaism at that time and other religions with all of their faults were dealing rather realistically with their culture and then bang. that unknown to any in the power structures God entered the world in Jesus of Nazareth, and nothing could remain the same. this is what bothers me about the proclamation of the church and advent. this is what bothers me about our sophisticated faith and world come of age. it is full time now for, for us to wake out of sleep for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believe. this last part of the text too. I remember, and so do you, I think. when we first believe the gospel the good news life was simple then. faith was beautiful. everything could be reduced to a personal basis. I had sin, God forgives sin God forgives me and our eschatology had little in it of bombs and wars of grace and poverty. all we needed and know was that if we were to dock we would surely go to heaven. choices were black and white. there were things one should do, and there were things one should avoid. now, there are still those who present this simple solution to our dilemma. Billy Graham and others exhort us to simply make a decision for Christ. moral re armament says have a quiet time every day and live pure lives without great concern over what's going on around you. and there are organizations that urge us to go back to God and others say, go to church, this sunday and take someone with you. you'll both feel better for it. I wake up each morning to a clock radio. and on weekdays, I wake up to a very soft voice talking sentimentally about the simple faith for five minutes. and then I get up and face the world. and on Sundays, I wake up to the old fashioned revival and nostalgically look back to a simple faith that I could affirm all of these are attempts to get back to the time when we first believed that somehow this just doesn't work. it's like seeing an old girlfriend after 10 or 12 years, it just isn't there anymore. now we can no longer live in a world which does not deal seriously with radical secularization the death of God's situation, ethics. and yet the message of advent is this, that in the midst of all of these systems and explanations and schemes and proclamations, that God may be preparing away and that God may be at work in ways strange and unknown to us. and we are not aware of God's continued incarnation because we are lulled into sleep by all the prophets crying out to be heard and in following, we think that we are a wide awake to what God is speaking. it is full time now to wake from sleep for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believe. when Paul wrote this letter to the church, to

Rome, there was an eschatological hope present in the faith of all Christians at this time. and it went like this that no matter what kind of situation we find ourselves in behold, our God will come and save us. it is difficult now to speak of such a hope for very few believe, even in their best moments that God will break into history to save us. I am troubled by the conclusion I seem to reach the sun. you see, I have this great temptation to say you want to see God at work in the world, now look! Here He is here in east Harlem or in west side Chicago or in Watts or in the Delta ministry in Mississippi or in the Edgemont community center. now maybe he is, but I don't know. what I do wish to proclaim is probably as nebulous as it is naive. it is a simple message of hope that something is happening in our presence in our own age. and that God is being born. I must believe this. I do believe it. if I do not, there is no advent message for me. a number of you, I hope, viewed the gospel according to Saint Matthew this past week, all of us I think were impressed by the frugality of the production by the simpleness of the message. but there is one scene that sort of sticks with me. when Jesus came out of the wilderness after the temptation and was walking along the fields, and there he met a group of peasants. and as he passed by he seemed to whisper to them and say, "Repent. The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and all week I've been tempted to pass this word along in the corridors of the divinity school, on the streets of the city, repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. this is the message of advent. the season, looking forward to that, which is coming. that is, that there is more to come that this is not the last chapter and that we must wake up and be prepared for what is to come. an old advent hymn which we don't sing states, this very positively. hark, a thrilling voice is sounding Christ is nigh it seems to say. cast away the dreams of darkness all ye children of the day. you know what hour it is. It is full time for us to wake from sleep. the night is far gone. the day is at hand and salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believe. in the name of the father, and of the son and of the holy spirit. amen. even in this enlightened day there may still be a prayer for us in the advent collect from the book of common prayer, let us stand. let us pray. almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light. now in the time of this mortal life in which thy son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility. that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal through him who liveth and reignith with thee and the holy ghost now and ever, amen. may the peace of God, which passeth to all understanding, abide in your hearts and minds and keep you always in the knowledge and love of God and of his son Jesus Christ are our Lord may the blessing of God, the father, son, and holy spirit be with you and abide with you now and evermore.