

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Bigger Picture Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, September 5,
2017 8:15 AM **1 Thes 5:1-6, 9-11;** Lk 4:31-37 (There is this opportunity to awaken
to the providence of God caring for us and holding us in spite of the devastations.)

“Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.”

Staying alert and sober is Paul’s way of talking about living in the Spirit; another way of saying this is **being conscious of who we are in Christ and letting that consciousness permeate all that we think and say and do.** It is a transformation of life as we normally see it on earth, which is ordinarily driven by all kinds of goals having nothing to do actually with God, motivated by all kinds of intentions that are primarily self-centered. What Paul is really talking about is **to be aware of something higher going on that involves us all.**

Now it is God’s divine providence that allows us actually to sleep, that is, to be unaware. That’s all part of God’s way of letting his creation move. He gives creation a certain sort of freedom, and **human beings have the most freedom.** We can either fall asleep and remain unaware altogether of God or we can awaken. Now **God’s grace is always addressing us, always encouraging us, but we are not required to respond to it.**

So now there are different things that are happening here. He is talking about people who are concerned, you might say anxious, about life. He says well, you know, there’s a season for everything. There is a hurricane season when some people’s lives are turned totally upside down; they lose everything. That does happen. That has been happening in the world all along, not only through hurricanes, but through various disasters, sometimes economic, sometimes geological, sometimes caused by something else, wars for example. **Being devastated is part of the world God made. He allowed it to suffer these devastations,** for reasons that we can never actually penetrate.

But even within them, **there is this opportunity to awaken to the providence of God caring for us and holding us in spite of the devastations.** This of course requires, as you might well see, the cooperation of many people. How could it be otherwise? We are all one. **If we are all one, we have to act as one.** And if a devastation causes us to care more about other people and build up other people, then that devastation has, if you dare call it, a silver lining, a gift. There's a gift involved in that. And that's what Paul's reasoning here is. **No matter what happens, there's a gift in it.** If it's a devastation, the gift will be in being helped by strangers or in being moved to help strangers or in somehow getting out of the little circle of self that we have created.

On the other hand, we have to have the long term view. St. Paul says here that God has not destined us for wrath. **God has destined us for life,** for gaining salvation through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ, so that **our goal is really to be with God in communion eternally.** We can already anticipate that now, and that's the whole idea of **the sacraments. They are all signs of this grand destiny.** And there are ways in which we can participate in this grand destiny even in this very moment. That's what a sacrament is. **It's a sign in this very moment of something that transcends time and history with all its ups and downs.** So Paul's idea is **we have to keep our mind on the bigger picture.** And then the little things that happen, even if they are really not so little, will not throw us into confusion. We will suffer heartache. **We will feel misery, but we will not be hopeless.**