

*Pay attention to yourselves! Don't let your hearts be weighed down by dissipation and drunkenness and the distractions of daily life, so that day comes on you suddenly like the snap of a snare. For it will come on everyone inhabiting the earth. Keep awake in every season. Keep praying that you have the strength to flee all these things and can stand before the Son of Man.*

Luke 21: 34-36

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him; and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night; they will have no need of light or lamp or sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22: 3-5

Today we spend the last hours of the Church year. It is also the end of November and, in the northern hemisphere, many of us are struggling through the exhaustion of a long year and the ever increasing darkness. It is not difficult at this time of year to identify with Jesus' description in Luke's gospel of hearts that are "weighed down by dissipation and drunkenness and the distractions of daily life."

The *Fundamental Principles* remind us that the light and liberation described in the book of Revelation come about through our allowing ourselves "to be formed by God through the common, ordinary, unspectacular flow of everyday life." At many times, however, our experience is of not paying "attention to ourselves" as the gospel summons, and so the "common, ordinary and unspectacular" experiences of our lives tend more to wear us down than to form us into Christ's life within.

The challenge, if we are to know the light that Revelation promises, is to grow in our practice of vigilance. It is to "pay attention" to ourselves, to grow in awareness of the depth dimension of the common and the ordinary. When and how do we dissipate our energies? In what ways do we self-medicate our own pain and fall into our own modes of addictive behavior? What types of experiences push us to distraction rather than presence to self, others, and God? Life and world are charged with God's presence and creative and formative love. But we often miss the chance for the encounter because we are "weighed down" and dispersed. To "pay attention to" ourselves is among the most difficult of spiritual practices. Yet, if we are not present to ourselves, then we are in no position to receive the gift of grace that God gives through the world and other persons.

In the classic spiritual text *The Way of the Pilgrim*, we hear of how the Pilgrim's initial efforts at interior solitude and continuing prayer introduce him to the transformed world of which Revelation speaks.

*Sometimes I spent almost the entire day in the woods, diligently reading the Philokalia. I drew much and marvelous knowledge from it, and my heart burned hot for union with God by means of interior prayer, which I was struggling to learn under the guidance and verification of the Philokalia. . . I was beginning to have an inkling about such things as “the interior secret person of the heart,” “true prayer,” and “worship in the spirit,” “the kingdom is within us,” “the Spirit intercedes for us with inexpressible groaning” come before me, abide in me, give me your heart and to put on Christ, “the betrothal of the Spirit in our hearts,” “the cry from the heart Abba, Father!” and others besides. When I began to pray with my heart with all this in mind, everything surrounding me took on a delightful form: the trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, and the light. All things seemed to be saying to me that they existed for humanity’s sake, that they were testifying to God’s love for humankind, that they all were praying and singing the glory of God.*

*The Pilgrim’s Tale, Second Meeting*