



Awake, Oh Sleeper! 11-5-2017

by Fr. James Schmitmeyer

Mark Twain was so impressed with a bright young preacher one Sunday morning that he decided he would drop a five-dollar bill into the collection plate later in the service. By the time the preacher finished the sermon, however, Mr. Twain decided to withdraw money from the collection plate to compensate himself for the waste of his time.

As a preacher, I admit that I do not always give sufficient consideration to my listeners. I am reminded of this each time my music director chooses the hymn, "Let Us Build the City of God," as the recessional song for Mass. Here are the words:

Awake from your slumber, arise from your sleep, a new day is dawning for all those who weep.

When I hear these words at the conclusion of Mass, I think, "Was my homily really that bad?" *Awake from your slumber, arise from your sleep. The preaching is ended, now go in peace!*

I recall serving a rural parish years ago back in the Midwest. Our little church offered that last Saturday evening Mass in the surrounding area, so many farmers would trudge into church after having milked cows, chopped wood or worked in outside in harsh weather the entire day. In the winter time, the pews were packed shoulder-to-shoulder and the room temperature in small church was always set on high. Many of the farmers barely made it past the opening hymn before nodding off. I wanted to sing out: *Awake from your slumber, arise from your sleep. The Mass has just started, try stomping your feet!*

Those Masses are the only times that I have not blamed myself for people falling asleep in church. Normally, whenever people nod off, I know I have not done my job as a preacher. So, I try hard to make my preaching relevant, timely and interesting.

But, in truth, communication is a two-way street. When I notice someone engaged in the homily and looking as though they are interested in what I'm saying, my energy is heightened and my delivery improves. I'm not longer reading words off a page.

So, thanks to all you active listeners out there! You help me keep the homily moving and the rest of the church awake. I am much obliged for your contribution. It is worth far more to me than a five-dollar bill in the offering plate.