Both Paul and Jesus tell us that we must stay awake because we don’t know when, the Lord will come. But it’s not always easy to stay awake, is it? I know that often Mary and I will sit down to watch a television show in the evening. It’s usually something we have recorded so we can fast forward through the commercials. And the fact that we’ve recorded it means that it is something we both wanted to see. Of course, since it’s recorded, one of us will have to be controlling the remote. But it hardly ever happens that one of us doesn’t end up falling asleep during the show. When there is no fast forwarding through the commercials, I’ll look over and see that Mary has dozed off. So I’ll say, “Are you sleeping? I thought you wanted to see this. Give me the remote.” And then a few minutes later I will have dozed off and she will say to me, “Are you sleeping? Give me the remote!”

I have to admit that sitting in my chair and falling asleep during a television show hardly ever leaves me feeling refreshed. It’s like waking up after some kind of medical procedure for which we’ve been anesthetized – we’re awake but still a bit out of it. Actually, I think that sometimes our falling asleep is our body’s way of anesthetizing us to life. We fall asleep either because we’ve had a hard day and so it seems good to slip into the land of oblivion for a while, or because we’ve come to be bored or dissatisfied with life.
and sleep seems better than facing up to the fact that we have become dispirited, that our life no longer seems to have much meaning and purpose – at least not enough to get us up out of the chair.

Now please don’t get me wrong, I realize that sometimes it’s good to rest and to get recharged, and that falling asleep in front of the television set isn’t always a bad thing. In fact, it might be better for some of us to do it more often. But if we find ourselves doing this a lot and not feeling refreshed when we do, it may well be that we have fallen into the kind of sleep that both Paul and Jesus speak of in our scriptures today. Rather than an embracing of life, this is a kind of sleeping that it is an attempt to escape from it. Now please hear me when I say that I am not speaking here of those who are suffering from the illness of depression, where sleeping more is one of the symptoms of the illness. Rather, I’m speaking here of those of us who have simply let life get away from us somehow, and so we find ourselves sleeping more to get away from facing up to it.

There are certainly many things that can bring us to this point. Perhaps we’ve been treated badly by others and we’re having a hard time getting over it. Perhaps we’ve experienced a number of hardships and somewhere in the midst of it all we’ve lost our zest for living. Or perhaps we’ve tried to follow our dreams but things just haven’t worked out as we had hoped, and we’ve become disillusioned. Or perhaps we’ve just been wandering
through life without any clear path and have grown tired of it, and so, for a bit of relief, we sleep. I certainly understand how a person can find themselves falling into this kind of sleep because I’ve been there and done that.

This is the kind of falling asleep that Jesus and Paul are warning us about in our readings today. It is a way of living that is really non-living. It is a way in which our prayers and actions become little more than sleepwalking, where there is no spark, or any expectation that what we are doing really matters all that much -- or at all. Now what Jesus and Paul are doing in speaking about this kind of sleeping is pushing us to reflect upon this question: Is this really the way we want the Lord to find us when he comes – the Lord who said that his desire for us is that we have life and have it abundantly – the Lord who, according to Paul, makes it possible for us to rejoice always in the good life to which he has called us? Do we really want our Lord, who wants so much for us to be fully alive, and who has done so much to make this a possibility for us – do we really want him to find us sleeping in a kind of spiritual stupor when he comes?

So what can we do to wake up, to be more fully engaged with life and even to be happy about it? Well, I don’t think that constantly dwelling on our sins, failures, disappointments will get us very far in this regard. Rather, if we want to wake up and get more fully engaged with life, the best thing we can do is to get in touch once again with
the knowledge that it is good to be alive. And it is, you know. I watched an interview
with the pop star Bruno Mars on 60 Minutes the other night. And part of it had to do with
his growing up in poverty in Hawaii. For much of his childhood, he lived in some
ramshackle abandoned home, with little food, no running water, and few of the luxuries
that most of us take for granted. But when asked if this had been hard for him he said that
those were the best years of his life. Why? Because his family always had to pull together
in order to survive. Because they always had one another for company, for support, and
for fun. And they saw so clearly how good this was. Often the poor realize that it is not
the trappings that make life good, but rather it is life itself, lived with love and joy that is
good.

So if we want to stay awake, to be fully alive, rather than always thinking about
what is bad about our lives, it is better to think about what is good. Think about the people
we love, think about things that are beautiful – magnificent sunrises and sunsets, the
majesty of mountains and trees, the wonder of things growing from the earth, the amazing
creatures with which we share our planet, the smiles and giggles of infants – whatever it is
that helps us to more fully embrace the knowledge that it is good to be alive – think about
these things. The more we do this, the more fully awake we will become, and the more we
will come to have a zest for life.
Another thing that will help us to wake up and be more fully engaged with life is embracing the knowledge that each one of us has something to contribute to life – that our lives are of great value. Since God created each one of us as unique individuals, no one can make the particular contribution to life that we can. That God has had something to do with our coming into being as the persons we are, means that God has a purpose for our lives -- that there is something that only we can do to complete the great and beautiful masterpiece God is in the process of creating.

So, rather than dwelling upon how we have messed things up, or about how we aren’t as good or talented as someone else, we would do far better to think about what we can do to make life better for someone else. Even in the midst of suffering and hardship, we are all in a position to contribute something to life, something that will help another to become more fully alive. In fact sometimes we can contribute more to the lives of others from the midst of our suffering. A smile, a kind word, and giving a helping hand in our own unique way makes life better for others.

Each one of us can do this. And when we do, we find that not only does it make life better for someone else. It makes life better for us too. It fills us with a new zest for life, and with a profound sense that our lives do have meaning and purpose. And this is what will enable us to stay awake, to remain fully alive, until the Lord comes.