

BE ON YOUR GUARD

In 1986 Robert Sikorsky, a syndicated columnist on automobiles, bought himself a 1984 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera sedan. A topflight mechanic fixed it up until it was pronounced to be "just like new". As part of an investigative report he was hired to do, Sikorsky then drove the car across the country stopping at 225 garages in 33 states. His job was to evaluate the competency and honesty of garage mechanics.

Before stopping at a garage, he'd pull a spark plug wire loose from the engine. This caused the motor to run roughly. A loose wire is something even a novice mechanic can quickly detect.

What happened in those 225 garages when the mechanic looked under the hood? Listen to Sikorsky's own words: "I got a satisfactory repair only 44% of the time. In the other 56%, mechanics performed unnecessary work, sold unnecessary parts, or charged for repairs not done. Worse, some of their work created new engine problems." Altogether, 100 useless remedies were prescribed. They ranged in cost from \$2.00 to more than \$500.00.

Consider an example that occurred at the auto center for a national retailer in Tucson, Arizona. Sikorsky had his wife take the car in. Again, here's his own description of what happened: "Somebody reconnected the wire but she was charged \$29.95 for a 'carburetor adjustment' and a timing check. The carburetor on the 1984 Olds was factory-sealed and should not be adjusted." Sikorsky ends his investigative report by warning motorists to be on their guard when it comes to garage mechanics. There are many very good ones but also some very bad ones. (Readers Digest May 1987)

You're probably asking yourselves, 'What's the link between Sikorsky's report and the season of Advent that begins today?'

The answer is simple. Sikorsky's automotive message to motorists and Jesus' Advent message to us are exactly the same. Both are messages telling us to be on our guard.

Jesus begins today's gospel with the words, "Be constantly on the watch!" and he ends with "Be on guard!" We know what Sikorsky is warning us to watch out for, but what is Jesus warning us to watch out for? What is he warning us to guard against?

This story dramatizes Jesus' message to us on this first Sunday of Advent. He's urging us to start living. He's urging us to stop putting things off. He's urging us to be on our guard against letting our life slip away without doing what we should be doing. He's urging us to use Advent as an opportunity to begin living as we should. He's urging us to use it as an opportunity to love as we should.

In brief, today's Gospel is a loving reminder from Jesus that our life is slowly slipping away. It is a loving reminder from Jesus that we should be on our guard against letting it slip away without doing the things God made us to do. It's a loving reminder from Jesus to begin living and loving.

When you do this, you will know that...

YOU ARE LOVED

Deacon Dan