

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED: 32ND SUNDAY A

‘Stay awake,’ says Jesus, ‘because you do not know either the day or the hour.’

A class of Year 12 Students was preparing to sit for their Victorian Certificate of Education final exams. The results would determine whether they would be accepted for university, and which university would take them. A bunch of the brightest students decided they would romp it in. So the night before every exam they partied hard. The rest of the class did not go to even one party and kept studying right up to the very last minute. When the results were published, many in the last group did just as well as those who went out partying. Some of the brilliant ones among the party-goers, in fact, missed out altogether on getting into uni. Their lamps, the lamps of their minds, went out at the critical times, just like with five of the ten bridesmaids in the story Jesus told us.

Of course, the point of my story is not exactly about the importance of exams, but the importance of being ready. Being ready, being prepared, when Jesus Christ, representing the God of surprises, offers us precious opportunities of one kind or another! So too the point of the story Jesus told is not really about ancient wedding customs or rescuing silly people from their own mistakes, or even staying awake at night. His point is specifically about being prepared, being on the alert for the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives at any time, and about being ready to welcome him whenever he comes. Even though we do not know in advance the day, the hour, or the form of his arrival! Will we hear his voice when he speaks to us e.g. in the plight of a stranger close by, in the pain of a family member, or in the need of someone working with us in our office, factory, or classroom?

A man phones the priest to say that his 45 year old neighbour and friend has just dropped dead while out jogging. He leaves behind his adoring wife, two small children, and dozens of family friends. A fit athletic person never expects that a late afternoon run will be the very last thing he does in his life. One hopes that his lamp of faith was still burning inside him, that he wasn't putting off e.g. the word he needed to speak - a word of love to some of the people in his life, and a word of forgiveness to others. One hopes that he had made good and wise choices in his life, and that he took seriously the standards of Jesus for facing the judgment of God. One hopes that people would say and God would acknowledge, that he was a man of compassion, who helped his neighbours, who reached into his wallet to feed the hungry and clothe the destitute, and who went out of his way to visit sick people or prisoners.

A holy old monk was sweeping up the fallen leaves in the monastery garden when a visitor asked him: ‘What would you do, Brother, if you knew you were to die in ten minutes time?’ The old monk replied: ‘I'd keep on sweeping.’ How wise and sensible!

No doubt we've all heard the slogan ‘Carpe diem’ -‘Seize the day!’, and in the sense of taking every chance to do good rather than hurt or harm anyone or anything in any way. (That, incidentally, includes the environment, God's precious gift of creation that day after day is being terribly wounded and degraded by human greed and stupidity). ‘Seize the day, and the hour, and the moment’ is surely what Jesus is saying, and you won't find the door to

life slammed in your faces, the way it happened to those silly giggly bridesmaids, who turned up quite unprepared for the wedding feast.

The story Jesus told about having our lamps blazing with light reminds us that the words of dismissal at the end of Mass 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' or equivalent are all about going out from Mass to make a better world, by our love for God and by our practical love for our fellow human beings. Loving others in all situations, whether they are easy or difficult, or whether they are convenient or inconvenient.

Let's think and pray, then, about the message to us from Jesus today!

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