

Holy Spirit Province

PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Date - 3 November 2020



EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED: 32ND SUNDAY A

How have you prepared, or how would you prepare, for any or all of the following:

- An exam?
 - A job interview?
 - A wedding?
 - The birth of a baby?
 - Raising a family?
 - Your death and final destiny?
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‘Stay awake,’ says Jesus, ‘because you do not know either the day or the hour’ (Matthew 25:13)

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, they went out and partied every night before every exam. The rest of the class did not go to any parties at all and kept studying right up to the 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, in fact, missed out getting into uni altogether. 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 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 either the day or the hour or the form of his arrival. Will we hear his voice when he speaks to us in the plight of a stranger close by, in the pain of a family member, or in the need of a colleague in the factory or the office, the classroom or the hospital ward?

A man phones the priest to say that his 45-year-old neighbour and friend has just dropped dead 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 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?' 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!', 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 at the wedding breakfast quite unprepared.

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, both by loving our God and loving our fellow human beings in all situations, be they easy or difficult, be they convenient or inconvenient.

Let's think and pray, then, about the message to us from Jesus today, about expecting the unexpected, with our lamps of faith, hope and love fully ablaze!

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