

BEING READY FOR JESUS TO TAKE US HOME: 19TH SUNDAY C

'Be ready,' Jesus says, 'because I am coming at an hour you do not expect'.

A lady called Linda was putting her three tiny tots to bed. Suddenly, Anna, who had just begun kindergarten, said thoughtfully: 'Mummy, if the world came to an end right now ...' Linda gulped and said a quick prayer for guidance. 'Yes, dear,' she said, 'go on.' Anna finished her question: 'Would I have to take my library book back, or would it be okay to leave it at home?' Anna's innocent question and Jesus' clear words invite me to ask: 'How ready am I at this very moment to meet the Lord?'

Jesus calls on his followers to be on the job so to speak, with their sleeves rolled up and ready for action, on the day of his Second Coming. Just when that will be, nobody knows. Meanwhile, for those of us who will have passed on before the Second Coming, Jesus will also be coming for us at our death. Just exactly when that will be, we have no idea. We don't really know what year, what month, what day, what hour, and what minute any of us who are alive now are destined to pass from this world into the next. It might be in 50 years time or in 10 years time. It might be next year or it might be tomorrow. It could even be tonight. Who knows? God knows, and God alone knows.

No matter how strong and healthy we might be, life can be as fragile and as unpredictable as when a burglar breaks into a house in the dead of night. Remember what happened to Princess Diana, and many others. The all-important thing is to hear and heed the sensible advice of Jesus: 'Be ready! Be ready at all times and at any time! Be always ready to let go and let God!'

For those servants of God who are ready, Jesus offers a blessing: 'Happy those servants whom Jesus the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you the truth. He will put on an apron, sit them down at table, and wait on them.' They will find themselves at the table of the Lord, being waited on by Jesus himself, no longer just servants, but friends. Nourished, cared for and loved, just as he does at every Eucharist, but this time in a richer and fuller way.

How very important and necessary it is, then, that we heed the teaching of Jesus on how he will be coming into our lives at the end, by looking out for how he is coming into our lives now. In 'the signs of the times', in the people we meet, in the circumstances of every day, and in the opportunities that come our way to do good for others. Someone has said so wisely: 'I will pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do to any person, let me do it now, and not delay it, for I shall not pass this way again.' Someone else has said just as wisely: 'As we live, so we die, and as we die, so we stay.'

If we are convinced of the truth of those sayings, we will not only be people of faith. We will also be people of hope, people who pray with conviction and commitment three prayers we regularly recite at Mass: 1. 'Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection

you have set us free;' 2. '... we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ'; and 3. '...we look forward to his second coming'. Living like that, and praying like that will make those other words of Jesus come true: 'There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.'

When Jesus our Saviour comes for us, then, how would we like him to find us? We would surely like him to find us with our work completed. Life for so many of us is filled with loose ends. There are things undone and things half done, things put off and things not even started. May we be able to say to God with Jesus: 'Father, I have finished the work you gave me to do' (Jn 17:4)!

We would surely want Jesus to find us at peace with our fellow human beings. At peace and reconciled, with no anger still burning in our hearts, and carrying no grudges! We would also surely want Jesus to find us at peace with ourselves, with confidence that we have nothing on our conscience to trouble or hinder us, that we have experienced and celebrated God's mercy and forgiveness, and that we have put right anything wrong we have done.

So, when Jesus comes for us, if he finds us with our work complete and at peace with ourselves, with our fellow human beings, and with our God, we will surely feel totally safe and secure as he takes us into his arms, and brings us home to God.

For this most necessary of all blessings for both ourselves and others, from the bottom of our hearts let us pray to the Lord...

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