

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C: August 17, 2022

*"... at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come!"*

Some years ago, a friend of mine recorded a tape entitled *He is coming, are you ready?* The thesis of her talk was simply this: Jesus is returning to this world to come for each and everyone of us. He will do that in one of two ways: either He will come for us at the moment of our death, or *"at the last trumpet we shall all be changed,"* and He will come for us at His glorious second coming. (see 1 Corinthians 15. 51) At that moment, as Jesus tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew, He shall separate the good from the evil, *"as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at His left."* (St. Matthew 25. 32-33) And what is to become of us? Very simply, we shall be judged. Those who saw Christ in their neighbours, will run to Christ with joy, even though they might be somewhat bewildered.

*"Lord, when did we see Thee hungry and feed Thee, or thirsty and give Thee drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger and welcome Thee, or naked and clothe Thee? And when did we see Thee sick or in prison and visit Thee?" And the King will answer them: 'Verily I say unto you, as you did it to the least of My brothers, you did it unto Me!'"* (St. Matthew 25. 37-40)

The bewilderment of this particular folk is typical of the pure of heart who are about to inherit the earth! (see St. Matthew 5). Then there is the other group of people who are also confused.

*"Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to Thee in Thy needs?" Then the King will say unto them: 'Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it not to Me!' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (St. Matthew 25. 44-46)

What is so heart breaking (and so terrifying) is that many people in the second group (that is, the goats) are not people in the world who simply and actively denied the poor or the hungry. Rather, many of this group, I am convinced, denied the poor and the hungry by not deciding. *Not to decide is to make a decision.*

***Today's Gospel asks us to make a decision to actively be ready for Christ in whatever way He wishes to come for us! And the Lord has many disguises!***

Before getting into the heart of this article, may I point out that an ancient image of Heaven in the early Church, borrowed from the Gospel, is the wedding feast? Our Lord began His sacred ministry

at a wedding feast. On the night before He died, He gave us the Eucharist at the Banquet of the Paschal Feast, which is the "source and summit" of all our sacraments since it contains Christ Himself. (1) Finally, St. John uses this language in the Book of Revelation when, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he writes: *"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper (feast) of the Lamb"* (Revelation 19. 9) Thus, when Jesus is telling us to *"Gird our loins and light our lamps... awaiting [our] master's return from a wedding"* (St. Luke 12. 35-36) what He was in fact telling His listeners to do was to be awake, to be alert, to be vigilant and to ready their souls for Heaven! Or to put it in another way, as my friend said some years ago, *'He is coming, are you ready?'*

*"And should he come in the second or third watch (of the night) and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants!"* (St. Luke 12. 38) In the time of the New Testament, the *night watches* were kept according to Roman military time, thus, a twelve hour night was divided into four watches of three hours each: 'evening,' 'night,' 'cock-crow,' and 'early morning.' (2) With some estimating, it would seem that Jesus is saying that if, during the night watch or the watch when the cock crows (some time between midnight and 3.00 A. M.?) were the master to return and find that servant waiting for him, that servant would be truly blessed.

The early Church Fathers looked at these "night watches" which Jesus mentions in the Gospel in a rather interesting way. They considered that the second and third watches of the night referred to a man's middle and older life. In one's youth, it's equally easy to be converted to God or to sin. Such is the enthusiasm of youth. But as one grows older, a man begins to tire, and enthusiasm wanes. A careful reading of both the Scripture and the Fathers of the Church will discover talk of a "noontime devil," who simply wears a man out by hanging around and nagging a man to death with time and temptation!

As one grows older, as we lose the enthusiasm of youth, it grows harder to make decisions. While it is true that with age and experience, a man tends to make decisions more cautiously (at least, one hopes so), it is also unfortunately true that many men, under the guise of being *practical* or *moderate*, will either put off making a decision on a crucial matter until it's too late to make a difference, or worse, a man might decide by not deciding at all. But as I said earlier, not to decide is to make a decision. This can be crucial in many, if not all, the areas of one's life. And in the area of one's spiritual life, it can make the difference between Heaven and hell.

It's also true that we can grow less flexible as we grow older, that is, we can get stuck in old ideas, old approaches: the idea of changing our opinions about things and people we have known

becomes more and more difficult. Still, in this society, it must also be pointed out that there is a very unhealthy emphasis, indeed, there is literally a *cult* of youth and sport, which seems to imply that age and experience is no longer something that is to be valued. In the midst of these conflicting values, we need perhaps to remember the chief temptation of both middle and old age, and that is, in the midst of a bad society, we often grow tired of doing good. St. Paul warned the Galatians about this very thing: *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. And let us not grow weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.”* (Galatians 6. 7, 9)

What are we sowing in our lives? What decisions are we making – or not making – in our lives? In last Sunday’s Gospel we heard about the man who had done well for himself, so well, in fact, that he was going to tear down all his old barns and build new ones to store up all his grain. The man said to himself: *“Now, as for you, you have ample goods laid up for years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry!”* But the Lord said unto him: *“Thou fool! This very night thy life shall be required of thee!”* (St. Luke 12. 19-20) Would you be surprised if I told you that the good farmer in saying *“Eat, drink, and be merry!”* was doing nothing more than quoting a famous passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes, 8. 15 – indeed, one of the more celebrated passages of the wisdom books? So what is the problem? The problem with the farmer was that he sowed all of his hopes on earthly things, which as Jesus taught (and plain sense can clearly detect), will eventually decay. *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also!”* (St. Matthew 6. 19-21) It was not the man’s wealth or industry, that is, his hard work that was his undoing, but rather it was his sole trust in himself and his wealth that was his undoing.

*“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also!”* Years ago there was a very famous song that sold millions of records (now I’m really dating myself – who buys LP records anymore?!) entitled *Where is your heart?* The Christian is called each day to ask himself that question – not only each day, but throughout the day and night, even during the night watches. And what are we promised if we do so? Well, the Lord uses a very interesting image in the Gospel.

Jesus tells us that He will *“gird Himself, have the servants recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.”* (St. Luke 12. 37) But why are we surprised at this? This was the very thing Jesus did at the Last Supper.

*“Now... when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”* (St. John 13. 1) After the supper,

*with a towel “... He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with which He was girded.”* (St. John 13. 5)

The Lord has become a servant, girded with a towel. On the Cross He will be annihilated – the Cross is ‘I’ crossed out – and thus fulfill the ancient words of the prophet Isaiah:

*“Who has believed what we have heard? He was despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief...and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”* (Isaiah 53. 1, 3, 6)

And in the Eucharist He will continue His annihilation as food and drink, His Heart veiled for us, waiting for us, waiting, waiting...

As my friend said so many years ago, He is coming. In fact, He has already come, He is here! He has probably *passed by you* today any number of times. Knowing that it is difficult to make decisions and stick to them, I need to also remember that God has given me the help of the graces of the sacraments to strengthen me in holiness, to be charitable, to be prayerful, to make the necessary changes in my life so that I shall, indeed, be ready when Christ comes for me at the moment of death.

Depending on *“where your treasure is”* will probably depend on whether you see Him in the eyes of your brothers and sisters, or whether you hear Him quietly calling you from your heart or from the Tabernacle. The prayer of blind Bartimaeus is a good prayer for all of us: *“Domine, ut videam – Lord, that I may see”* and we can even use the same prayer, addressing it to Our Lady, Mediatrix of all Graces, *“Domina, ut videam, ut audiam – dearest Lady, my Mother, that I may see, that I may hear!”* Let me see Christ as He passes by this day! If I am ready for Him now, then I shall be ready at the last moments of my life or whensoever He wishes to come. And that will be a very good way to live!

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition # 1324
2. *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, Matthew Black, D.D, D.Litt., F.B.A, Gen. Ed., Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Camden, New York, 1962, pg. 40