

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Using Time Wisely, we Know Neither the Day nor the Hour the Bridegroom will Come
November 12, 2023

Imagine that you get a call from a lawyer's office telling you that you are the main beneficiary of your Great Uncle Frank's will. I am sure you will reply: "Not interested" assuming it is a scam. Everyone had said that Frank was more than a bit eccentric and should avoid him. The lady calling asks you if you always went out of your way to visit him, joke with him, and even had meal with him at least once a week. Well, it turns out that Great Uncle Frank was really rich. He died two days ago leaving you a great deal of money, but in his typical fashion, he had certain rules. Everyday for a year, you would receive \$86,400. The money would be administered by the lawyer's office. You had to spend the \$86,400 every day. You couldn't withdraw it nor save it to your personal bank account, and you had to show receipts for how you spent the money everyday. At the end of each day, whatever you did not spend would be removed from the account, and you would start with a fresh \$86,400 the next day. I am sure that you and I would find some really creative things to do with the money. Now, let's return to reality. Every day we are given 86,400 seconds to use wisely. Every night, God writes off as lost whatever portion of this time we have not used well or have wasted. In the bank of time, there are no balances and no overdrafts. Each day a new account is opened for us. Each night, what remains is written off, lost, gone forever. Everyday's 86,400 seconds have to be invested in commodities that will hold their value from day to day, quarter to quarter, year to year and beyond. These commodities are lasting values like justice, compassion, forgiveness, and love.

Did you ever read the comic the Wizard of Id? That's the one with the little short king. In one strip, King Twerp calls the royal monk in to ask him a theological question, "How do you feel about capital punishment?" "There's not much we can do about it," the monk says. The King is quite puzzled by this answer, "What do you mean that there is not much we can do about the death penalty?" "Well, the fact is," says the monk, "that we are all born with it." The proper Christian attitude about death is not to deny, but to prepare for it. To push death to the back of our mind as something to be faced at a later date is the foolishness Christ condemns in the gospel. The five bridesmaids in the Gospel reading (Matthew 25:1-13) who were prepared to enter the wedding reception is the wisdom Christ wants us to have. They didn't know when the bridegroom was coming, but they were prepared and ready. So how do we prepare? During WWII and maybe in Ukraine and Russia today, survivalists prepare secret places where they hope to live for months or years because of the devastating war. They gather supplies: food, water, toilet paper, etc. These methods are all wrong. We do not prepare for the end by saving a lot of stuff, or by doing a lot of things. We prepare for the end by nurturing the proper Christian attitude, by cultivating a personal relationship with God which one must possess, work at and live because it cannot be borrowed at the last minute. Some of the most important words in scripture are from Paul's Letter to the Romans: **Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.** (Rom 12:1-2).

"Be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Paul tells us to take an attitude of life that is completely different from the attitude of the world. Throughout the Gospels, particularly in Matthew's gospel where this Liturgical year A is taken, Jesus emphasizes the need for inner transformation. His complaint against the Pharisees was that they were hypocrites. They behaved one way, but were another way. He called them whiten sepulchres. On the outside, they looked nice and clean. On the inside they were rotten. The tax collectors and prostitutes who turned to Jesus transformed their lives. Their devotion to the Lord was a reflection of the Christian disposition they had taken on. So, how do we form and nourish the Christian attitude of life? On the negative, we cannot give ourselves over to that which destroys the presence of the Lord. We live in a materialistic society. To the vast majority of society success is counted in the amount of possessions a person accumulates. Pleasure, even fleeting pleasure, is the goal of life. The glorification of sex is just one of the many ways that this is expressed. We have to fight against the forces outside of us and, particularly, within us that are drawing us into materialism and away from the Christian disposition of life. On the positive, we can form and nourish the Christian disposition by continually communicating with the Lord. We need to pray daily. We need to find a time, even if it is brief, but still a time when we can be with the Lord and freed of the distractions of life. If we have a family, then we have

the additional responsibility to pray as a family every day. Bedtime prayers when the children are little is a great time for this. As they get older, Mom and Dad should continue praying with their children every evening and then, as time goes on, for their children every evening. The main focus of our prayer life should be on the Lord's Day, Sunday. On Sunday we celebrate the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord and, if we are able to come to Mass, receive the Eucharist. The presence of Christ within us in this sacrament gives us the strength to be who we claim to be, Christians. Christ is always prepared to meet us, so we, on our part, must be prepared to meet him. This Sunday's first reading (Wisdoms 6:12-16) speaks about wisdom as a way of life. The wise are always ready for the Lord because they are always united to him. The gospel brings home the importance of being ready and prepared while we wait, by loving God and our neighbour. Be ready to celebrate the banquet of the Lord's love.

A few years ago, Steve McEveety, the producer of such Hollywood classics like, "The Passion of the Christ" and "Braveheart", was giving a lecture, speaking to a group of promising Catholic college students who wanted to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. During the question and answer period one of the students asked one of the most obvious, and perhaps hardest questions, "Mr. McEveety, what is your goal in life?" The successful Hollywood Producer paused and looked out the window for a moment. We can just imagine what all the students were thinking at that time. They were probably going through their own list of personal goals, wondering how they would measure up in comparison. Then Mr. McEveety turned back to the audience and responded, matter-of-factly: "My goal in life? To get my kids into heaven. And I guess to get there myself, too." You could have heard a pin drop; it was as if that were the absolute last thing they expected to hear. And yet, that's how all of us, as Christians, should answer that question. What else matters if we end up getting locked out of the Lord's house? When the call comes, what will count are the qualities of character we have developed, not the riches we possess, or the fortune we have gathered or the fame we made for ourselves.

St. Jerome, one of the most intelligent and well-educated men in the history of the Church, grew up in Rome in the fourth century. In addition to being one of the greatest writers of all time, an accomplished Greek and Latin scholar (with a special expertise in the work of ancient Rome's greatest rhetorician, Cicero) a secretary to Popes, the official translator of the Bible, and a valiant defender of the true faith against all heretics. St. Jerome was an expert in the spiritual life. But he didn't get to such heights of sanctity without his struggles. In fact, as a young man, when he was just beginning to make a name for himself, he had a dream that changed his life. He found himself before the judgment seat of Christ, and was asked, "Jerome, what is your faith?" He answered, "I am a Christian." He received the following unexpected response from our Lord, "You are not. You are a Ciceronian." And in fact, Jerome himself admitted, upon later reflection, that he was so in love with his studies and with the intellectual life that he hadn't completely given himself to Christ. His priorities needed change.

What's our first priority? Is it really Christ and his Kingdom? That's the only thing that will bring peace of mind and healthy order to the hustle and bustle of our lives. Is our lamp full of the oil of faith, which we can't borrow from anyone else but have to develop in the intimacy of personal prayer and reflection? Are we keeping that lamp filled by persevering and growing in our prayer life and constantly studying Christ and the teachings of his Church? Now is the time to renew this first priority, to put our lives back on track. That's what the Church is inviting us to do through today's liturgy, as the end of the current liturgical season approaches. And it is the most practical thing we can do, because it has the most important consequences. If we need to refill our lamp, we should start doing so right now, during this Mass, when Christ comes once again to be our light. Staying awake must be the axis around which our whole being and life rotate. And if we don't know how to rearrange the other aspects of our lives to put them in line with that first priority, the Church is here to help. We can always find guidance and assistance if we only look. Jesus promised, "Seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). A great way to start this process of personal renewal is simply to come to confession. Let's renew our commitment to Christ and promise him to do whatever it takes to wake ourselves up and refill our lamps. After all, "***we know neither the day nor the hour.***"