

November 16, 2008 – 33rd Sunday OT A

LESSON: We Don't Know When Christ Will Come Again

Every Sunday we say in the Creed that Christ will "**come again in glory** to judge the living and the dead."

This is the issue St Paul is discussing in today's Second Reading.

- ? One of the many problems and controversies that the Christians in Thessalonica were dealing with was the **timing** of that second coming of Christ.
- ? As all early Christians, they believed that it was going to happen **very soon**.
- ? As a result, some of them started predicting **exactly when**, and they started interpreting natural phenomena and historical events as **indications** of the date, and this guessing game was **distracting** them from their real life-mission.
- ? This is a common human tendency – in fact, some get caught up with predictions from Nostradamus or the Mayans – whose solar calendar ends on 12/12/12.
- ? This shows how we like to think that we are **in control** of things, and so we **flee from uncertainty**, even when that means compromising the truth.

But St Paul reminds them, and us today, that the **only thing** we know about the date of Christ's second coming is that **we don't know** the date of Christ's second coming.

- ? St Paul **strongly reaffirms** the fact that Christ **will come again**, and until then we have to continue **battling evil** by building up Christ's Kingdom on earth.
- ? But he also stresses the fact that "the day of the Lord will come **like a thief in the night**."
- ? In other words, it will come **unexpectedly**; we cannot predict it; God has chosen to keep the date hidden.
- ? But since we know that it **will** come, St Paul reminds us, we are no longer in the **dark**.
- ? We know that the world's (and also our own personal) history **will come to an end**, and we know **how**, we just don't know **when**.

As a result, Paul concludes, we should "stay sober and alert," focusing on our task of **following Christ**, not "falling asleep" by giving into **worldly habits** of self-indulgence and getting swept away by the rat race.

ILLUSTRATION: Passive Christians?

When Paul tells us to stay "sober and alert," he does not mean that we should go through life **frowning and passive**.

Christians are the ones who live in the **light**, who are **awake** - that means we are called to be **lively, creative, and active**.

And in fact, that's what all the best Christians have always been: **fully engaged** in life, using their talents to the maximum to glorify God and build up his Kingdom.

That's the lesson from today's **Gospel** passage.

- ? The servants praised by the master are the ones who took their talents and went into business.
- ? They got **involved** in the world around them.
- ? They took **risks** and **challenged** themselves.
- ? They lived with **gusto and vigor**.
- ? The **foolish** servant was the one who **retreated** into himself, who refused to make a commitment or take a risk.

As followers of Christ, we are called to **transform** the world, to spread the Gospel directly and indirectly, to be the **best** artists, athletes, teachers, business people, politicians, and scientists the world can find.

To use our God-given talents well, we must **develop** them fully and then put them into **action**, **glorifying God** by **serving others** and bringing **light** into this sinful, darkened world.

That's what **St Paul** himself did.

- ? He didn't build a **fortress** around himself and **passively wait** for Christ to come again - that's not what being "sober and alert" means.
- ? He **tirelessly preached** the Gospel, traveling all over the civilized world in order to communicate God's goodness.
- ? That's the **Christian spirit**.
- ? Knowing that Christ will come again, that there is a **purpose** behind human activity, has made Christian culture the most active, **creative** culture in history.

As Christ himself put it, "I have come that they might have life, and have it **more abundantly!**" (John 10:10)

EXAMPLE: Tough Yes

Staying "sober and alert" means **always being ready to say yes** to whatever God may ask, trusting that **his** plans are better than **our** plans.

During the Nazi invasion of Europe throughout World War II, many Christian families had this faith in God **put to the test**.

- ? The Postma family, a father and two children, were living in a **small country village** in Holland when the Nazis invaded and conquered their country.
- ? Initially, their lives were affected very little.

- ? As the war continued, though, the Nazis instituted their program of Jewish identification, deportation, and eventual extermination.
- ? Devout Christians, the Postmas' prayed fervently for God's **intervention**.
- ? On a crisp March evening in 1943, their pastor paid them a visit.
- ? After some tea and small talk, the pastor's face became serious. "I want to tell you the real reason for my stopping by tonight," he said in a sober, hushed tone.
- ? "I was wondering if you would consider taking in someone," he said slowly.
- ? That someone, of course, was a Jew.
- ? A person to be hidden from, not only snooping Gestapo agents, but even from the Postmas' **neighbors**.
- ? A person to be fed, clothed, entertained – but never revealed.
- ? A person whose mere **presence** in the home could result in a trip to the gas chamber or a bullet to the head – for **all** of them.
- ? The Postmas' knew that saying yes would mean living from then on with **caution, subterfuge, anxiety, and even terror** as they dodged the Nazi search parties.

What would **we** have said to that pastor?

- ? The Postmas' said **yes**; they knew that it wasn't the **pastor** who was asking for their help; it was **God**.
- ? And as a result, 22-year old Jewish girl lived with the Postmas' until the Nazi defeat in 1945.

The Postmas' were "sober and alert"; they **recognized** God's call in their life, and responded with courageous generosity.

APPLICATION: Re-Engaging in Our Mission

The Christians Paul was writing to in Thessalonica believed so **strongly** that Christ's second coming was right around the corner that some of them even **stopped working** and **neglected their families** because of it.

That was an **overreaction**, and Paul **corrected** it in his Letters.

Today **we** are faced with a **different** temptation.

- ? We **believe** that Jesus will come again, but we really don't think it will be in our lifetime, and so we tend to **under-react**.
- ? We **naively take for granted** that we will have 70 or 80 years to enjoy our life on earth, and so we make **compromises**.
- ? We forget that history could end at any moment, like a **thief in the night**, or that our personal history could end at any moment, since death is **always** by our side.
- ? When we forget that, we **lose focus** in life, we "**fall asleep**," as Paul put it.

Unlike the wise woman in the First Reading,

- ? who **works hard** all day long putting her God-given talents at the **service** of those around her,
- ? we tend to look for a **comfortable path**, doing some good,
- ? but thinking mostly about how to squeeze a **reasonable amount of pleasure** out of life's necessary duties.

Today Jesus wants to **wake us up**,

- ? to remind us that **each one of us** has a mission in his Kingdom (and in our hearts we know what it is),
- ? and that only an **energetic effort** to fulfill that mission, to creatively and courageously put our God-given talents at the service of those around us,
- ? will give us the **happiness and meaning** we long for.

In this Mass, as we come to Holy Communion, Jesus supplies all the **graces** we need to wake up from our spiritual slumbers and live our mission more passionately and profoundly.

Let's give him the joy of putting those graces to **good use** - getting at least **one** area of our life back in order, **right away** – knowing that time is short – and pledging that, until Christ comes again, we will not fall asleep – but be active and fervent in using our talents to change the world.