

Stay Awake, Be Ready!

Wis. 6: 12-16; 1 Thess. 4: 13-18; Matt. 25: 1-13

This week, we are being treated to 'Indian Summer', a period when the weather reminds us of late summer; sunny days with temperatures in the mid-teens. But, we know that this weather will be short-lived because already we have had a taste of frost and even a flurry of snow and ice pellets that remained on the ground for a short while. We have been forewarned of the 'big sleep' of nature.

We are led to think of endings. The end of the growing season. The end of the liturgical year. The end of the calendar year. And the end of life.

It's amazing how quickly life can change. In the third week of January, my wife and I went to Manila in the Philippines. I made sure to pack some masks because, late in 2019, a volcano had erupted near Manila and we heard that volcanic ash and dust was falling on the City. However, when we arrived, we needed the masks because of COVID-19 protocols. We heard nothing about the volcano.

We came back to Toronto on Family Day in February shortly before airline flights between Canada and Hong Kong were suspended. By mid-March, we were in full lock-down mode and people were becoming seriously ill and dying in large numbers. In a two-month period, the world was turned upside down without warning.

St. Paul encourages the Thessalonians telling them that Christ will come back to the world and take His followers to join Him in heaven to stay with Him forever. But Jesus tells the parable of the prudent bridesmaids warning that we must always remain ready because we do not know when He will come.

Jesus says that we must keep awake because we know 'neither the day nor the hour' that He will return. Like the prudent bridesmaids, we must prepare our lamps by filling them with oil and trimming the wicks. We must not procrastinate in this; otherwise, we will be like the foolish bridesmaids and be unprepared for Christ's coming. We will be scrambling to get ready and miss the opportunity of accompanying Jesus and be shut out of entry into heaven.

In this day and age, most of us don't have oil lamps so what is the oil that we need to store up? St. Gregory Nazianzen called it the 'oil of good works'. To be clear, we cannot work our way into heaven, but we can show that we are followers of Jesus by following His commandment that appears later in Matthew 25 to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to nurse the sick, to visit the imprisoned and, generally, to care for the least among us.

As we enter into this time of endings, with the help of God's grace, let us be prudent and use the time that we have been given to build up our store of 'oil' so that we will be ready to meet the Bridegroom when He arrives.