

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – August 7, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat., 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 740 words

The Israelites believed that God would lead them out of Egypt to a better place, the Promised Land; the first reading recalls that Passover event. And so at the instruction of Moses, God's representative, they stood ready to flee as soon as the Lord began to fulfill his promise. They were to have their loins girt – that is, to be dressed for the journey, ready to go, with belts and sandals on. They were not to put any yeast in the dough – no time to let it rise; they would have to eat their bread quickly. And they were to eat standing so that they could be ready to leave at a moment's notice. All of this was so that they could embark on a journey to a land they had never seen, towards promises yet unfulfilled. They accepted the Lord's command on faith, and they eventually saw its fulfillment.

The gospel tells a similar story: Christ says he will come at a time we do not expect. We truly do not know the moment of our death; much less – should we live to see it – the moment of his second coming. But we are told to be ready for it, with loins girt and lamps lit for the journey. Except that for us, this will not be a physical journey; there is no movement in death. Rather, it will be a spiritual one. To have our loins girt thus means to have our souls on standby, in a state of attentiveness or wakefulness, sensitive to God's presence in our lives and ready to meet him face-to-face. To have our lamps lit means to have his sanctifying grace in our souls, so that we are oriented towards him and guided by his light amidst the darkness of this world.

Those who take these things seriously do so because they believe, on faith, that there is something far better beyond this world that is worth striving for. And they want to be ready for their own passover from this life to the next. We accept on faith that heaven is real (and so is hell), and that heaven is worth striving for. We are able to do so because we have received the gift of faith from God. Do you take that gift for granted? If so, you risk losing it. We must ask God for a stronger and deeper faith each day! Never take the gift of God for granted! And with that gift, we are able to receive Christ's admonition with a holy fear and reverence and prepare ourselves so as to live ready for the moment of his coming.

Like many of you, I find myself hearing or reading the news each day and asking how much longer God will permit us to follow the path we are on in this world. How much longer until he intervenes, even in a dramatic way? So many nations, who truly owe their existence and so much of what is good and fine in them to the Christian faith and specifically, to the Catholic Church, have left God behind. If so many people are questioning this way, then it is time for us to be more serious than ever. The time for us to get serious is now! Ask yourself this question, and be brutally honest in answering: Are you ready? I would be an alarmist only if the gospel did not speak this same way – and even stronger.

Ask yourself also: Have you confessed all of your serious sins? Are you living in God's sanctifying grace? Are you always striving for conversion of life? If the Lord were to come for you this very moment, would St. Peter usher you into paradise, or at least lead you to the gates of purgatory? Or would you be found, rather, without a wedding garment? Again, folks, the time for us to get serious is now. There is no room for wishful thinking or unfounded hopes here. In my time I've heard people express the most unbiblical hopes, such as that God will somehow get everyone into heaven, or that hell does not exist. I'm sorry, but this is not what the Word of God tells us! Let us live in reality; let's live ready. May we not fall prey to the erroneous ideas swirling around us. Lord Jesus, increase our faith! Lord, help us always to be ready for your coming! Amen.