

Be watchful and vigilant

By Fr. Gonzalo Meza¹



We are often so anxious about the things of this world that we forget about the last things. The tradition of the Church called those last things “Novissimi”: Death, Particular Judgment, Heaven and Hell. Jesus is telling us today to remain watchful and vigilant for that day: “Gird your loins and light your lamps, and be like servants who await their master’s return ready to open when he comes and knocks” (Lk 12:35-36).

“Jesus speaks to his disciples about the attitude they should have regarding the final encounter with him, and explains how the expectation of this encounter should push us toward a life full of good works” (Pope Francis, Angelus, August 7, 2016).

The readings of this Sunday have an eschatological perspective. Eschatology comes from the Greek *eschaton*, which means “last things,” “end times.” The first generation of Christians were anxious about the return of the risen Christ. They were worried because it delayed more than they expected. The wait was becoming too long for them. Throughout the centuries, Christians realized that we should not be overly concerned about the signs and the times of the second coming of Christ, because the time is unknown, even for the son of God. It will happen but we do not know when. What we should be concerned for is the time where we meet the Lord, at the end of our pilgrimage on earth, because at that time we will appear the Tribunal of God, where Jesus, the Just Judge will determine if we were faithful or unfaithful to him.

Having in mind that divine meeting, Jesus invites us today to be watchful, and remain always faithful to his Word. He invites us to remain in the road of salvation, so that we can reach our final destiny. The Church teaches, “each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith. New Testament texts speak of a final destiny of the soul—a destiny which can be different for some and for others.” The Church teaches that each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven, or entrance through a purification or hell (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1022). We need to be alert because our eternal destination depends on our faithfulness and relationship with Jesus, and we need to be always prepared. “You must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.” “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival” (Lk 12:37).

In the Gospel Luke presents some examples of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. In the first one Jesus talks about the parable of a master coming back home. He finds his servants awake and ready to serve him. “Blessed are those servants... Amen I say to you the master will gird himself, have them recline at table and proceed to wait on them” (Lk 12:37).

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In another example, Jesus talks about a household manager or steward who have three main roles, to direct the affairs of other workers, to supervise them, and to serve their needs. Jesus said, “Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing [his job]... But if that servant says to himself ‘My Master is delayed in coming’ and starts to beat the servants, then the Master will come on an unexpected day and at unknown hour and will punish him severely” (Lk 12:43-43).

In these examples “Jesus portrays life as a vigil of active awaiting, which precedes the luminous day of eternity. To have access [to this day], it’s necessary to be prepared, awake and busy with the service of others” (Pope Francis, Angelus Aug. 7, 2016). St Cyril of Alexandria says, “When Jesus comes and finds us girded, awake and our hearts enlightened, then he immediately will make us blessed. ‘He will gird his loins and serve them.’ By this, we learn that he will reward us proportionately. Since we are weary with toil, he will comfort us, setting before us spiritual banquets and spreading the abundant table of his gifts².” If we are not ready nor prepared for our final encounter with Jesus, we will not be in the place that Jesus wants us to be.

What do we need to enter into the blessedness of Heaven, acquired to the price of the blood of Christ? We need to be watchful and vigilant; living our lives as heirs of the Kingdom of God (Cf. Hb 11). In our baptism we received the unmerited and freely given gift of salvation and were made coheirs of the Kingdom. In baptism, we entered into a salvific relationship with God. The problem is that many times our life does not reflect our dignity of being children of God and coheirs of the Kingdom. The dignity of being children of God requires more than considering oneself good. It requires more than not stealing, not killing and not doing big bad things. The dignity of being heirs of the Kingdom requires that we live every day as if we were already in the blessedness of Heaven, living as citizens of the Kingdom of God, free from slavery to sin, freed from anxieties, and unhealthy burdens and ties. That is the way to remain in the road of salvation, which Jesus acquired with his Incarnation, Passion, death, resurrection and Ascension into Heaven.

It is easy to be faithful when everything goes well, when everything goes according to our plans. However, most of the times, that is not the case, because God has different plans in our lives. In those cases, we need to be even more vigilant and watchful to remain in the road of salvation, faithful to Jesus. How do we do so under unpredicted circumstances? The second reading gives us the key. To be faithful to Jesus and to remain in the road of salvation, we need faith and perseverance. The best example is Abraham, a model of faith and perseverance. Abraham shows us that when we enter into a relationship with God, when we become heirs of the Kingdom, we do not know the road ahead of us, “they did not received what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar, and acknowledged themselves.” That is why the letter of the Hebrews says, “faith is a realization of what is hoped” (Hb 11:1).

We expect to live in the fullness of the Kingdom of God, but here on earth we walk in the darkness of life, illumined by the lamp of faith “our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield” (Ps 33:20-21). In the book of wisdom, we have another example of faith and perseverance. The passage recalls how God fulfilled his promise to free his people from the oppression of slavery. In spite of so many adversities, and infidelities, they trusted in God, “The night of the Passover was known beforehand to

² Just, A. A. (Ed.). (2005). Luke (p. 214). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

our fathers, that, with sure knowledge of the oaths in which they put their faith... your people awaited the salvation of the just and the destruction of their foes" (Wis 18:6.7).

When things do not go as we planned, we are invited to be faithful and to remain in the road of salvation. To do so, faith is necessary so that we can say as the palmist, "Our heart is glad in God because we trust in his Holy name" (Ps 33:21). If for some reason we were unfaithful to our relationship with our savior, and got out of track of the road, there is a place where Jesus can take us back: the confessional and the Mass. Jesus told St. Faustina Kowalska: "Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the Tribunal of Mercy. There the greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated. To avail oneself of this miracle, it is not necessary to go on a great pilgrimage; it suffices to come with faith to the feet of my representative and to reveal to him one's misery, and the miracle of Divine Mercy will be fully demonstrated."³

Pope Francis said: "In her motherly solicitude, the Church strives to show the believers the path to follow in order to live a fruitful life of joy and peace. Illuminated by the light of the Gospel and supported by the grace of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we can guide our decisions toward the good and withstand with hope and courage the times of darkness and the most tortuous paths. The path of salvation, through which the Church guides us and accompanies us with the strength of the Gospel and the support of the Sacraments, gives us the ability to defend ourselves against evil" (General Audience, Sept. 3, 2014).

³ St. Faustina Kowalska, Diary, 1448.