

Time is a funny thing. Sometimes its passage seems endless; sometimes it passes in the wink of an eye. At a certain stage of life, we think we have an unlimited amount of time; then, later, we realize we don't.

Time is a matter of perspective. As Dr. Seuss put it:

How did it get so late so soon?

It's night before it's afternoon.

December is here before it's June.

My goodness how the time has flown.

*How did it get so late so soon?*¹

Dr. Seuss wasn't the first to ponder the nature of time, of course. So did Jesus. Often. Many of his parables, for example, involve our relationship with time. How do we understand it? How do we approach it? With indifference? Or with expectancy?

For example, in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins going to greet the bridegroom, the "sensible" ones are careful to bring oil for their lamps. The "foolish" ones do not. The bridegroom is delayed, and they all fall asleep waiting for him. When he arrives suddenly, the foolish ones have no oil for their lamps, it having been depleted during the night, making it difficult to find him and they miss the bridegroom's return as they scramble to find more.² Is this just a matter of poor planning on their part? No, it's a lack of expectancy, Jesus says. "Stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour."³

The point Jesus is making is one taken up at length by Augustine, who observes that we live in two entirely different dimensions of time concurrently.⁴ There's what we usually mean by "time"; that is, today is Sunday, tomorrow will be Monday, next month will be

¹<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/180800-how-did-it-get-so-late-so-soon-it-s-night>

² Mt 25:1-13.

³ Mt 25:13 (NJB).

⁴ See Augustine, *The City of God* (Veritatis Splendor Publications: Kindle Edition), 123ff; 289ff.

November, and so on. Then there's sacred time: time as God experiences it; that is, as eternity. And the mystery of Christ that we celebrate at every liturgy hinges on the fact that in Christ, in the Incarnation, both aspects of time meet. We meet the sacred, we're embraced by the sacred, in Jesus — and that's to say we meet the eternal right here, right now. The only question is: are we ready? Are we prepared? Because if we are, we learn to experience time with a sense of expectancy. We learn to be alert, to be vigilant. We learn that grace is most often conveyed in the ordinary experiences of life; we learn to discern that the real presence of Christ manifests on cold, rainy Monday mornings as much as it does on the altar; we learn that Christ isn't just the Lord of Heaven and Earth, He's the Lord of the routine and humdrum, too. And so, we expect Him not just any time, but all the time.

Which brings us to our friend in today's Gospel, the poor unfortunate who's undoubtedly thrilled at his good fortune in unexpectedly being invited to a wedding feast, only to end up being bound and tossed out into the night.⁵ Really, now. Doesn't this seem a bit harsh? After all, how was he supposed to know he'd end up being invited to a wedding?

That's the point, though. He didn't. Neither did the other guests who ultimately ended up attending. Yet they managed to ready themselves and arrive appropriately attired. They didn't know the day or the hour, either. But they did recognize that they had been visited by something extraordinary. Our unfortunate friend didn't; for him, it was just a continuation of his day. The other guests recognized the appearance of the sacred in their day; our friend didn't.

For him, it did indeed get "so late, so soon". He was invited, but he let the invitation slip through his fingers by failing to recognize that a wedding feast isn't a come-as-you-are affair. It involves preparation, it involves a change of clothes, just as Jesus tells us that entering His Kingdom involves preparation, and our change of clothes is our conversion and

⁵ Mt 22:1-14

repentance — not just once, but throughout our lives since we never know when we'll be visited by grace. "Repent," Jesus tells His listeners repeatedly, "for the kingdom of heaven has come near."⁶ And it comes near every day, not just when we're called from this world.

Without expectancy, though, without trying to stay alert, we'll have a hard time recognizing the ways in which the eternal visits us in the minutes and hours of our day-to-day lives. That's unfortunate, because when that happens, we, too, might end up lamenting "how the time has flown".

⁶ Mt 3:2 (NRSV).