

Fr. Curtis Miller November 7-8, 2020 Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Later.” It can be one of the most dangerous words in our spiritual lives. Later. Maybe we aspire to do something good, like devote more time to prayer or volunteering to help people in need. But then we say to ourselves, “I’ll get to that later, when I’m not so busy, when my kids grow up, when hunting season is over, when I retire.” The danger of “later,” though, is that no one is guaranteed a “later.” If there is something good we feel God calling us to do, let’s not put it off until later. Let’s do it now.

Consider the regrets of people who are dying. Many regret spending too much time trying to become rich and successful, instead of spending time with loved ones. Let’s avoid those regrets. If we knew that we only had a short time to live, what good things would we want to be doing? Well, let’s not wait. Let’s start doing those things now.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Screwtape Letters*, in which he imagines a conversation between devils discussing their methods of tempting people. In one scene, the senior devil recalls a time when a person was just about to make a major spiritual breakthrough and come to have faith in God. The devil tried to distract him with hunger, but the man resisted the temptation. So the devil agreed that what he was thinking about was very important, indeed much too important to consider on an empty stomach. He would do better to go eat, and then think about God later. So the man went out for lunch, resolving to think about God later, but he soon forgot and missed out on this opportunity for spiritual growth.

If “later” is such a dangerous word, what is its antidote? “Vigilance.” Keeping vigil is an ancient Christian custom. We are vigilant, in particular, for the return of Jesus. As Christians, we believe that Jesus, Who ascended back into Heaven forty days after His resurrection will return. There are three moments when Jesus will come to us:

1. at the end of time, at the Last Judgment,
2. at the end of our individual lives, at our particular judgment, and
3. at ordinary moments every day, throughout our lives.

We must be ready for all of these moments when Jesus will come to us, preparing and keeping vigilant by always striving to live a holy life, not putting it off until later. In His parable from today’s Gospel reading, Jesus uses an example from Jewish wedding customs in His time: keeping vigil for the arrival of the Bridegroom. The ten virgins, or bridesmaids, are responsible for welcoming the Bridegroom when He comes. Yet only five remain vigilant, while the others let their lamps burn out and miss out on joining the wedding celebration. In this parable, Jesus Himself is the long-awaited Bridegroom, and each of us is responsible for remaining vigilant for His arrival. If we are not consistently trying to live holy lives, practice charity, and foster a life of prayer, then we might miss

out on joining the celebration of Jesus' return and find ourselves shut out of eternal life in Heaven.

Liturgically, we keep vigil on the eves of important holy days, like Christmas and Easter, as well as for every Sunday. That's why we can have Sunday Masses on Saturday afternoons. It's not really about having more opportunities to attend Mass. Rather, Sunday is so important, the day when we commemorate Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday, that we begin our celebration of this great mystery with a vigil at the end of the day before. We are in the position of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary Magdalen, St. John, and the other disciples: waiting. Waiting often in sorrow or uncertainty, but waiting with hope because we have put our trust in Jesus.

We know that He won't allow us to remain in the shadow of death and failure. We're not at the final victory yet, but we know that it's coming; we're certain that God will fulfill His promises to us who remain faithful to Him. Often, we can feel like Moses who, after forty years of leading God's people out of slavery and through the desert, was right at the edge of the Promised Land, but without the strength or the time left to enter it. Still, we have ascended to the mountaintop and we look out across the valley. We can see the Promised Land. And even though we might not get to enter it in this life, to rest there, and to enjoy its fruits, still we are satisfied because we know that God always fulfills His promises, if not in this life, then in the next. So we wait and we watch, we strive to be ready for whenever Jesus returns, keeping our lamps filled with oil and our wicks trimmed, ready to go out and meet our Lord when He comes.

We pray, "Marantha," "Come, Lord Jesus." We do not look ahead to the day of our death or the end of the world with terror. Rather, we see beyond them. We see the coming of Jesus. And so we look forward to that moment, whenever it comes, in God's good time, with joyful hope and expectation.