

“Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Lk 12:39-40).

Today we do not fear the thief in the night, but we do show great concern for the Coronavirus. With over 40 million cases worldwide and over a million fatalities, the virus comes at an hour we do not know in every corner of the globe. The Gospel cautions us to be ready for the return of the master.

As the months march forward, there is a weariness that sets in. But vigilance is still required and so we continue to wash hands frequently. We wear masks to protect others from anything we might transmit. We warn those who do not wear masks that they can protect others by donning a mask. And we stand at least 6 feet apart from others to provide a buffer of protection.

The Gospel is concerned with our spiritual health. In the immediate decades after Jesus ascended into heaven, there was an imminent sense that Jesus could return at any time and so people lived in joyful expectation of the second coming of Christ. Nearly 2,000 years have passed, and one might say a spiritual weariness has set in. We know not the hour nor the day when Jesus will return, and we are cautioned to be ever vigilant.

While the virus can make us ill or take our life, sin is more deadly. If we forsake God for a life of sin, we may lose the promise of eternity unless we repent. Sin harms ourselves, our relationship with others, and our relationship with God. So, like our precautions for the virus, we should put into practice disciplines that will help us to stay safe.

- The equivalent to washing our hands frequently is to ask for forgiveness of sins on a daily basis. Each night, as we prepare to go to sleep, we can review our day and look for ways that we acted selfishly or hurt others. Saying an Act of Contrition or an Our Father and making an effort to try to do better the next day is helpful. We may also find that we have done somethings really well, and we might ask God to help us to keep up the good that we are doing. For more serious sins, try to visit a priest for sacramental confession.
- For the virus, we wear a mask so that a spray of aerosol that might come out of our mouths is stopped by the physical barrier of the cloth of the mask. We cannot put a mask on to stop us from every sin, but there are somethings we can do. If our speech is the source of harsh words towards others, we need to think before we speak. Will my words help or hurt someone? If I cannot say something nice, then maybe it should not be said at all. If our eyes turn to lustful images on the internet, then we need to enable safety features built in to limit where our eyes might wander. Jesus cautioned, “if your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out” (Mt 5:29). We should not try to blind ourselves, but maybe we need to cut out use of the internet all together if we cannot use it properly.
- With social distancing of at least 6 feet, we can prevent the spread of the virus. If we keep our distance from things that we know are harmful to us, we can maintain a proper vigilance. If we have a weakness for alcohol, then sins of over consumption can be prevented by keeping our distance from bars, liquor stores and social gatherings where the wine flows too freely. If the Mayor of Anchorage had kept his distance from someone who he was not married to, he would not have become embroiled in a wrong relationship that caused him to resign from office.

So, there are a number of concrete actions we can take to avoid the near occasion of sin. “Stay awake! For you do not know when the Son of Man will come” (Mt 24:42a, 44).

There is another approach that we can take that involves going on the offensive rather than playing defense. "Stay awake." Jesus often spent quiet time in prayer away from others in the evening. His 40 days in the desert, his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his withdrawing to a mountain top to pray at night are all examples. He spoke to his Father from his heart and listened for the will of the Father. As we pray The Lord's Prayer and recite the words "thy will be done" we too are asking the Father for his guidance so we may act according to his desires and not our own.

As we listen intently in prayer, the Lord may help us to see the more serious needs of others over and above our own concerns. Reaching out to help our neighbors, sacrificing for the good of others, helping the stranger are all positive ways to stay vigilant. When the master comes at an unexpected hour and sees us deeply involved in helping others, he will be most pleased with our vigilance.