

December 2019

**“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”
(Mt 24:42)**

In this passage from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his definitive return. This will be unexpected and take them by surprise.

At that time, there were many serious difficulties, wars and sufferings of all kinds. For the people of Israel, hope rested in the Lord’s intervention; he would put an end to their tears. Waiting, therefore, was not about fearing what was to come, but rather relief that the time of salvation was approaching.

Here Jesus points out a great secret: to live the present moment well. This is because he will come while we are absorbed in our work and daily activities. Those are the times when we often forget God because we are too busy worrying about the future.

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

“Keeping awake” is an invitation to keep our eyes open, to recognize the signs of God’s presence in history and in our daily lives. It means to help people enveloped by a sense of darkness to find their way in life.

Uncertainty about the exact day of Jesus’ coming puts Christians in an attitude of continuous expectation. It encourages them to concentrate on living the present moment, on loving others today and not tomorrow, forgiving now and not later, transforming reality in this very moment — not just when we find time in our schedule.

In a commentary to this passage, Focolare founder Chiara Lubich wrote in December 1978: “Have you noticed how generally speaking we don’t live life, but muddle through it waiting for ‘later,’ when that ‘something beautiful’ will happen? This ‘something beautiful’ will come, but not as we expect. A divine instinct makes us wait for someone or something that can satisfy us.

“Instead, we might be thinking of a special celebration, some free time or someone we are going to meet. But once these have happened, we are still not satisfied, at least not fully. We carry on with a humdrum existence that is lived without conviction because we are always in wait.

“The truth is that, among the factors that make up our life, there is one from which no one can escape: it is our personal meeting with the Lord who comes. This is that ‘something beautiful’ toward which we are unconsciously tending, because we are made for happiness. And only God can give us full happiness.”

“Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”

The Lord Jesus will certainly come at the end of each person's life, but we can already recognize him as truly present in our lives. He is in his Word, which we can hear and live out; in every brother or sister, to whom we can extend our welcome; in his voice in our conscience; and in the Eucharist, which we can celebrate and share.

Today too, life brings many challenges, and we might ask ourselves, “When will all this suffering end?”

We cannot wait passively for the Lord to intervene. Every moment can be used to hasten the coming of the kingdom of God, God's plan for all to be one family. Every little gesture of love, every kindness, every smile we give can transform our existence into continuous and productive waiting.

Paco is a hospital chaplain in Spain. He meets many elderly patients who suffer from serious degenerative diseases. He shared this story.

“Before knocking on the door of one particular patient, (someone very critical of religious faith), I hesitated for a moment. But since I wanted to give witness to God's love, I entered with my best smile and spoke kindly to him. I explained the beauty of the sacraments and asked if he wanted to receive them.

‘Of course!’ he replied. Together we celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation and he received the Eucharist and the anointing of the sick. I stayed with him a little longer afterwards.

“When I left, he was calm and peaceful, and his daughter, who was with him, was amazed.”

Letizia Magri