December Word of Life

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

Word of Life

for ages 4-8 **|** for ages 9-17 **|** Print **|** Audio

In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is preparing the 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 on 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 when we are busy working and doing the normal things of daily life. Those are the times when we often forget God because we are too absorbed in worrying about tomorrow.

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“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 we can help others who are living filled with 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 and not when we find time in our diaries.

Reflecting on this Word, Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, wrote, "Have you noticed how generally we don’t live life but muddle through it waiting for “later” when something "beautiful" will happen? The fact is that this “beautiful later” will come anyway but it will not be what we are expecting. A divine instinct makes us wait for someone or something that can make us feel satisfied. Instead, we might be thinking of a special celebration, some free time or someone we are going to meet, but then, once these have happened we are still not satisfied, at least not fully. We carry on with a humdrum existence that isn’t lived with conviction, because we are always waiting. 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 the "beautiful thing" towards which we are unconsciously tending, because we are made for happiness. And only he can give us full happiness.”

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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; in every brother or sister who we can welcome; in his voice that speaks 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 a continuous and fruitful waiting.

Paco is a hospital chaplain in Spain. He comes across many elderly patients who sometimes suffer from serious degenerative diseases. He told this story. "When I knocked on the door of an elderly patient’s room, (someone who is very critical of religious faith), I hesitated for a moment. But I wanted to witness to God’s love so I went in with my best smile and spoke kindly to him. I explained the beauty of the sacraments and asked if he wanted to receive them. He replied, "Of course!" 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