

"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 the disciples for his definitive return, which will be unexpected and take them by surprise.

Even in that historical period there were many wars, problems 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 it would be the time of salvation.

Here Jesus points out a great secret, which is 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". This is an invitation to keep our eyes open, to recognize the signs of God's presence in history and in our daily life. It means we can help others, who are living in darkness, to find the path of 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 when we find time in our diaries.

Reflecting on this Word, Chiara Lubich wrote: "Have you noticed how generally you don't live life, but muddle through it waiting for "later" when something "beautiful" will happen? The fact is that this "beautiful later" must come, but it is not what you are expecting. A divine instinct makes you wait for someone or something that can satisfy you. You might be thinking of a special celebration, your time off, or someone you are going to meet, but once these have happened you are still not satisfied, at least not fully. And you carry on with a humdrum existence that isn't lived with conviction, because you are always waiting. The truth is that, among the factors that make up your life, there is one from which no one can escape: it is your face to face meeting with the Lord who comes. This is the "beautiful thing" you are unconsciously tending towards, because you are made for happiness. And only he can give you full happiness."¹

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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 his Word, to hear and live; in every brother or sister to be welcomed; in his voice that speaks in our conscience; in the Eucharist to 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 often loudly criticises the 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".

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