

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020 A

“They all became drowsy and fell asleep.” That’s a really bad line to start a homily! But I like this Gospel for its realism about our human weakness and limitations, even if we are sincere in our desire to meet the Lord. Jesus foresees that we will at times grow weary, waiting for God. Whether it is from the sufferings of life; or from the endless commentary these days that inflames and confuses rather than informs and inspires; or just the dullness of spirit that arises from routine, we all become drowsy disciples now and then.

The Gospels tell us that this is exactly what happened to Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asks them to “Remain here, and keep watch with Me” ... but from confusion and anxiety and just human weariness after a good Passover meal, they fall asleep. In his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict writes about this moment: **“Across the centuries, it is the drowsiness of the disciples that opens up possibilities for the power of evil. Such drowsiness deadens the soul, so that it remains undisturbed by all the injustice and suffering ravaging the earth. In a state of numbness, we prefer not to see all this; we are easily persuaded to continue in the self-satisfaction of things that make us comfortable in our opinions.”** So sleepy and numb spirits are a problem for a disciple, but also inevitable because of our human limitations –what then are we to do?

As Jesus tells the parable, someone was still awake, watching for the Bridegroom. ***We can’t always be awake, but we can always be ready to be awakened by a Voice announcing the presence of God. The Holy Spirit is that voice*** – speaking to our conscience when there are decisions to make; calming our hearts in moments of stress; calling to us through other people, who inspire us to live up to our potential and do what is right and good, even when it is difficult or unpopular. God does not cease trying to rouse us, but the Voice of the Spirit is easily drowned out in the busyness of our days, in the relentless lure of

screen time, even in our daydreams. We need to practice in knowing that Voice through prayer and reflection and silence, so we can respond readily when Christ approaches us.

So waking up is necessary, but not sufficient – *we also need to be prepared to wait*, and that is perhaps the greater challenge in today’s frenetic world. In the parable, this is precisely what differentiates the wise and the foolish ... having something in reserve in the face of delay. All ten of the attendants fell asleep – but the wise had thought ahead – what if it takes longer than we expect? *In a restless culture, and uncertain times filled with anxiety and conflict, the vigilant patience of a disciple seems like a waste of time.* But we fill our lamps with regular prayer, acts of service that keep our skill for charity sharp, and the love of those around us. Even if our spirits start to doze, these build resilience so that we can attend to what we CAN do and not become overwhelmed and paralyzed by the problems the world. Can we be strong enough, trusting enough, patient enough, to WAIT FOR GOD?

Just as surely as the Bridegroom comes to us in the Eucharist, so will He come, to ALL of us at the end of time, and to EACH of us when we fall asleep in death. *We can’t always be awake, but we can always be ready to be awakened, and welcomed to the Supper of the Lamb.* This week, when your alarm goes off, ask the Holy Spirit to help you be ready to meet Jesus in the people you encounter and the opportunities to serve they will bring. Precisely in the darkness and drowsiness, the call is there: “Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!” May that call find us patiently ready to enter into joy.