

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Wisdom 18:6-9 / Luke 12:35-40)
07.08.2016

Today's gospel from Luke 12 concerns not only the final generation of the human race. It is relevant to us.

We are told that we are to be *dressed for action*, awaiting the Master's return.

How are we to be dressed for action? We are to be robbed to serve.

Just as Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist to wash His brethren's feet, we too must don the apron of humble service.

The Last Judgement scene in Matthew 25 reminds us that the Master comes to us under various guises: in hunger and thirst, a stranger; naked, sick, a prisoner.

A thread runs through the Scriptures that shows the Lord to be present everywhere – in all sorts of places, situations and persons.

So often we fail to recognise the Lord's presence, for He comes to us in disconcerting ways. Jacob's extraordinary experience at Penuel, recounted in Genesis 32 comes to mind. In the heart of a dark night of combat, Jacob wrestled and was injured. But, he emerged extraordinarily blessed through the struggle he endured. *The Lord was there and I did not know it.*

The Lord is there with us in the rough and tumble passages of our lives, at those moments when we wrestle, be that with an opponent or with our own demons.

Of course, we can miss out on the Lord's manifestations because we are otherwise engaged, preoccupied, wrapped up in our *self*. We can close ourselves into our obsessions and routines. We busy ourselves to avoid meeting our *self* and the Lord who lives within us – our multiple occupations a pretext for holding the Lord and others at bay. Frenetic activity appears respectable; it may give a smug conscience and even a self-justification to put up signs at the door of our hearts - *No Entry ~ Do not disturb ~ Stay out.*

We can be seduced by self-importance till it dominates and enslaves us.

The gospels and the whole Christian tradition teach us that Christ comes to us in every person we encounter, every situation we traverse, every circumstance we face – showing us that Christ comes to us in our varied states – in gladness, sorrow, joy and pain. We can hear what He may be wanting to say to us in and through everything we experience: our tiredness, distress, feelings of guilt or shame... or again, in our sense of well-being, liberty of mind, freedom of heart... We discern that we are situated in God's will when a deep peace dwells in our hearts. We know the Lord is at hand, when we allow ourselves to be comforted and consoled, established in confidence and trust.

The Risen Christ says to us: *I am with you always*. This surely means that He is near at hand even when we feel He is far away.

The Lord can come to us in the strangest, most painful of circumstances. The experience of that crushed man whom we call *the prodigal son* comes to mind. God made Himself manifest to this broken man in the depths of despair, gripped by spiritual death, lost in sin. When this wounded man came to his senses, daring to go *into himself* and confront his own misery; when he re-connected with his lonely, miserable heart, he found the Lord waiting to meet him, to give him the courage he needed to rise and return to his father.

At the heart of today's gospel is a call to be vigilant, attentive, tuned in, to all that is going on within us and around us.

But, that is not enough, we need to *be dressed for action*, ready to respond to the Lord's encouragement to follow the lead He gives us.

Like Christ-Jesus, we are called to engage ourselves in the humble service of our brothers and sisters.

Our vigilance is measured by our willingness to respond with generosity to the needy, showing attention to the poor *who are always with us*. It is revealed by our simply being there for those who need a smile of compassion, a listening ear, a kind word, a small gesture of loving care, a little sign of proximity.

Once we grasp this, then we actually fulfil our Christian vocation. We become not only a reflection, of Jesus, but an incarnation of *the Servant Christ* among our sisters and brothers in humanity.

On the morning of the 26th of July, in the church of Saint Etienne du Rouvray in France, the assassins of Father Jacques Hamel thought they snatched his life from him. They were deeply mistaken. As he celebrated the Eucharist with his small weekday congregation he was found robed to serve them, *dressed for action*. We must remember that this man's life was already given many years before, and that self-offering was one he renewed daily in his humble service of God's faithful people.

Father Jacques Hamel saw Christ in every person he encountered and he made Christ manifest to all those who were blessed to have contact with him. He surely saw his assassins in God's own light.

I am sure he could make his own words of another martyr of our time – Dom Christian de Chergé, of the Monastery of Tibhirine in Algeria in 1996. Dom Christian's throat was, likewise, slit (along with other members of his monastic community). Dom Christian had left a testament for his monastic brethren and family *to be opened on the event of my death, should it be a violent one*. In this letter, he asked that they accept that the Lord and Master of all life was not a stranger to his brutal killing. He spoke of His life having already been given and so it was not taken from him. He left a moving final message for his assassin: *And you also, the friend of my final moment, who would not be aware of what you are doing... I commend you to the God, whose face I see in yours. May we find each other, happy 'good thieves', in Paradise, if it pleases the God and Father of us both*.

Gathered now for Eucharist, we are called to recognise the Lord in the breaking of bread and the cup out-poured. We are challenged to go forth to see Christ in all those we encounter. We are sent to love and serve Him in each and everyone, making Christ manifest in the world He loved and came to serve.