

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of St. Thomas More, NYC**  
**Nov. 28, 2022**  
**Advent 1st Sunday of Year A Mt 24:37-44**

You may be familiar with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, composed mainly of African-American dancers. They perform at City Center every December and are a real joy to watch. Their signature piece is a work entitled, "Revelations," a series of Gospel spirituals performed kinetically by the various dancers. One of the works in the piece is "I Wanna Be Ready to Put on My Long White Robe." You can find it on Youtube and is well worth the viewing, as are all the other pieces in the work. I mention it because it reflects the theme of today's Gospel—"being ready," but being ready for what is the question?

The season of Advent, which begins today, invites us to look forward not just to the celebration of Jesus' birth on Christmas Day but to that day when Jesus will come again in glory, when what began on Easter, with Jesus' triumph over sin, suffering and death, will reach its completion and fulfillment, when war and violence, egoism and selfishness, license and domination will be no more, and justice peace and compassion shall rule. When that will be, Jesus said on a number of occasions, "No one knows the day nor the hour." So, what do we do in the meantime? How do we get ready? Today's Gospel gives us some insights.

Jesus uses as an example the people in the time of Noah in the days before the flood, "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." They were caught up in the everyday affairs of life. There was nothing wrong with these activities, except that they were all-consuming. These activities simply kept them from knowing something deeper, something of vital importance for their well-being. So, they were ill-prepared when the flood came. Jesus goes on to speak of two men in a field and two women grinding meal. In each case, one will be taken into glory and one left behind. What can it be that accounts for the different outcomes, if they both appear to be doing the very same thing? The difference must be interior; it must be on the level of awareness. This sense of being alert is elaborated by Jesus in the final example of the man who did not stay awake, and thus allowed his house to be broken into. The warning is to be attentive for the "coming off the Son of Man."

With these examples in mind, I return to the question, "What do we do in the meantime; how do we get ourselves ready?" The risen Jesus may be coming into our lives even now to invite us into a deeper, richer, fuller experience of life. How prepared are we to greet Him when He arrives? The spiritual writer, John Shea, tells this fable,

“What is the World Like?” to illustrate how we may miss that opportunity. It seems God and a man were walking down a road discussing this very question. God said He would give the man the answer, if first he would get Him a cup of water. The man goes to a house, knocks on the door and a beautiful young woman appears. She invites him in and then prepares a meal for him. The man and woman marry and raise a family. Thirty years go by. The man becomes a respected merchant and an honored member of the community. One day he is travelling by sea and a storm arises threatening his life. He cries out, “God, help me.” A voice from the midst of the storms answers, “Where is my cup of water?” What is the world like? The world is a place of forgetfulness. What am I in danger of forgetting? That I am a child of God, that I am loved by God, and that I have a purpose, a destiny, a home waiting for me, as the Funeral Liturgy says, “not made by human hands.” The world is a place where we fall asleep, where we do not pay attention to the spiritual dimension of life. “Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, working in the field and grinding at the mill” take all our time and more importantly take all our mind, with the result that we can lose our focus, our purpose, our direction in life. One might even say, “How can I be so busy and yet feel so empty?”

In the weeks ahead of us as we get ready for Christmas, that danger will become even more acute. People already busy will become even busier. The holiday season means more shopping, more chores that have to get done. We begin to look forward not so much to the celebration of Christ’s birth, but to the lazy doldrums of January, when we can relax a little. The rush of the season works against the message of the season. Again, we have to be attentive, lest we treat matters of the spirit as a kind of luxury, something we can take up when we have the time. If our bodies were hurting, we would certainly pay attention and work hard to regain our physical health. If our financial security were threatened, we would take measures to see that we are protected. Yet we will allow our spirit to languish and atrophy. That was the error of the people of Noah’s time. They valued everything, but the Spirit that sustained them. We need to take the time, several times, in the course of the day to stay grounded, to be aware of what we are doing in a deeper sense than the merely material.

As you leave Mass this morning take a look at the stained glass window next to the baptismal font. It is a rendition of the painting, “Christ Knocking at the Door.” If you look closely, you’ll see there is no handle, no doorknob. Why?” Because the door to our hearts can only be opened from within. May we be ready to open that door, and greet the Lord when He comes.