

## Ready or Not

I hate to be the bearer of “bad news” but are you aware that Thanksgiving is less than two weeks away? It has kind of sneaked up on us this year as it is early. Actually, we are only one day shy of the earliest it could be. So, are you ready? Have you planned a menu? Have you made your list of what has to be done to the house before the company arrives? There is nothing like having company to make you start to clean and get the house ready.

As we get your house ready and we do our shopping for what you need to either host or take with us, we are bound to forget something that we simply “must” have in order to complete a recipe or a part of the meal that would “ruin” the meal if it were not present.

Oh, and by the way, there are only 42 shopping days until Christmas. That comes with its own set of “on your mark, get set, go!” items to be decorated, baked, purchased, wrapped, etc. There are parties to plan, concerts to attend, shows at the Women’s Club with the Westfield Theatre Group to be in or to watch, luminaries to purchase, poinsettias to purchase, and a host of other things that will all take place

somehow, someway, somewhere. Have I made you panic yet? I panicked while writing this!

Let's take a look at today's Gospel. In Jesus' time, it was customary that the wedding would take place upon the arrival of the bridegroom. There were other ceremonial things that happened beforehand around the preparations that were to be made. The "virgins" were modern-day bridesmaids whose job was to wait for the bridegroom and escort him to the wedding. However, they were only allowed to do so IF they had the oil for their lamps. It was considered a great dishonor to not be included in the procession when they had been selected to do so.

The reading between now and the First Sunday of Advent will address the concept of "being ready" for the second coming of Christ. This concept was not new to the original hearers of any of the Gospels. Even in Paul's letter to the various churches that were starting up, it was addressed that while you are waiting for the second coming, you simply can't quit what you're doing and sit there and wait for it to happen. Likewise, we cannot just stop our everyday lives and wait for the end of

ours, or even make detailed plans. For, as the end of the reading tells us, “Keep awake, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

In the past week, we finally finished our binge-watch of *Grace and Frankie* on Netflix. Now, you wouldn't think that this series would ever show up in a sermon. It has foul language, people are not exactly “nice” in it, and let's just say it is not “*The Waltons*.” However, as the series was finishing, the characters were all involved in either, “What's next?” or getting ready for what may have been their end times. One of the characters was experiencing memory loss. He finally admitted it and tackled it head-on. They worked to do what could be done to keep him at home, drug therapies that are out there, and perhaps, the plans when he could no longer remain in the house. Another character was convinced that she was going to die on a certain date, even though everyone around her did not believe her.

The quick version of that storyline is that while she had a close call near her “death date” she indeed did not die that day. But she did try to “get ready.”

What about us? Thanksgiving and Christmas aside, are we ready? I am not talking about having your legal documents in order, although that would be a very wise thing to do. My concern for all of us today is what would happen if the “Bridegroom” came for us today. Have we made peace with all that we have to on this earth to be ready to live with God in the next?

Now, I am not saying this to make us think that we are all going to die tomorrow. This getting ready thing is a life-long process. It goes along the way of how we treat ourselves, how we treat our loved ones, and how we treat our neighbors. Sometimes we forget that we have to get “oil for our lamps.” How many times have we forgotten something or someone? We get caught up in what we are doing and we forget that we have to watch out for those who need our help. It is important that we do what we need to do for ourselves so that we can be of service to others. That is also part of getting ready. We have to be ready for what we may have forgotten to do.

Sometimes, we have people in our lives who can give us gentle reminders of what we must do to get ready. Other times, we must offer

the gentle reminders to our loved ones or friends of what they may have forgotten. We have to be willing to share what we have, especially if we have more than enough, to those who, through no fault of their own, have forgotten to procure what they need. What they need isn't always material.

I know I have said this before, but when I was in the seminary we used to joke about the "ministry of presence." As I have grown older and hopefully a bit wiser, I have really come to appreciate the term and what it means. Sometimes, we just need someone to sit quietly with us, or we need to sit quietly with someone just so they know we are there for when and if they need us. You see, that's a part of being ready, too.

As you get things ready over the next weeks, take some time out to evaluate and reflect if we, too, are ready for anything that the Almighty might have in store for us.