

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - Be prepared to serve for the return of our Master
August 7, 2022.

The month of August is rich with celebrations: the Transfiguration of the Lord (6), the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15), the Queenship of Mary (22), the Passion of John the Baptist (29), and numerous beloved Saints, including Saint Dominic (8), Saint Clare (11), Saint Bernard (20), Saint Bartholomew (24) and Saint Monica (27). As we enjoy the summer, let us keep our eyes on Jesus, his Blessed Mother and his Saints and imitate them in holiness. BTW, sisters from St. Clare Monastery of Our Lady located in Stella Maris in St. Paul, AB are requesting parishioners to join them in praying the Novena to Saint Clare in preparation for the Solemnity of Saint Clare on August 11. (https://www.stpaulparishwb.com/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Novena-2022.pdf)

The central chapters of Luke's gospel present Jesus' instructions to his disciples, as he makes his final journey to Jerusalem. Luke preserves this teaching as a legacy for disciples of all ages. Our readings will be from this section until the Church's year is almost over. This part of Jesus' discourse balances out what he said a few verses earlier about not worrying. In those verses, he instructed his listeners not to fret about worldly concerns, but to trust in God's Providence. But he knows that some people will turn that invitation into an excuse for laziness, irresponsibility, and the pursuit of pleasure, so now he shows the other side of the coin. "***You also must be prepared,***" he tells his followers, like servants standing ready for the return of their master any minute. **If we want to live in communion with God forever, to experience the fulfillment he promises in this life and the next, we need to make friendship with God the number one priority of our lives.** The good things of this earthly life, its pleasures, challenges, and occupations, will come to an end when the Master returns. To live as if they were going to last forever, therefore, is foolish. Christ wants to make sure we don't act like fools. Jesus finishes his parable by telling us that, "***Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.***" As St Jerome said: "**To become what the martyrs, the apostles, and even Christ himself was, means immense labor - but what a reward!**" This is an essential part of our faith, and it's an essential part of our lives as human beings. **We were made for mission, for adventure.** When we reduce Christianity to fuzzy feelings or a few dos and don'ts, our natural yearning for purpose and adventure is frustrated. This is one of the reasons behind our society's addiction to senseless, destructive thrills. Extreme sports, cutting, raves, drugs are often used as substitutes for authentic excitement which comes from doing great things for Christ and his Kingdom.

In this Sunday's gospel passage (12:32-48) Luke follows from last Sunday's teaching concerning a right attitude to this world's possessions: ***'Get yourself treasure that will not fail you .*** What has gone before serves as an introduction to the theme of hope. **Christian hope is very fundamental in the lives of those who are true followers of Jesus. Hope - one of the 'three theological virtues'** (fundamental to our relationship with God; 1 Cor 13:13) is little appreciated by many whose faith is often too individualistic. **Christian hope is the certainty that, despite all appearance to the contrary, God's final reign will come: 'Fear not, little flock, it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom .** This certainty is essential to a vital faith, the second reading (Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19) tells us: ***"Faith is the assurance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen."*** This Sunday, we begin a series of reading from the concluding section of the letter to the Hebrews. The theme of hope is strong in this letter, written to encourage converts from Judaism who are nostalgic for their old ways. They are reminded of the great plan of God, and of faith's 'guarantee of realities that at present remain unseen - ' reminded of the amazing faith of Abraham himself trusting in God fulfilling His promise to make of him a great nation, even to the point of his willingness to sacrificing his only son Issac.

Philomena and I watched the 1981 award-winning movie **Chariots of Fire** recently. It's about the class-obsessed and religiously divided United Kingdom of the early 1920s. Two determined young runners train for the 1924 Paris Olympics. Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson), a devout Christian born to Scottish missionaries in China, sees running as part of his worship of God's glory and refuses to train or

compete on the Sabbath. He sees running as a win-win situation in that being fast gives him an added outlet to spread the word of God, while he sees his speed as being a gift from God, and he wants to run to honour God and that gift. He said: ***"I believe God made me for a purpose... And when I run I feel His pleasure. I have no formula for winning the race...And where does the power come from...? From within. Jesus said, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me." If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race."*** Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross), the son of a Lithuanian Jew, lives a somewhat privileged life as a student at Cambridge, uses being the fastest to overcome what he sees as the obstacles he faces in life as a Jew despite that privilege. In his words to paraphrase an old adage, he is often invited to the trough, but isn't allowed to drink. His running skill earns him the respect of his classmates and to some extent the school administration.

Like Eric and Harold in the movie, we are always fighting against those who mock us for our dedication to Christianity. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the negativity around us. That is particularly when we have to put up a fight for the Lord. Those of us who are blessed with children know it takes a tremendous amount of work to groom them into decent Christian men and women. They need lots of love to help them manifest their Christian identity. When we do this work with love, children experience Jesus in their homes. There is nothing in the world that we do that is greater than opening our children to their spiritual potential. But that takes continual, hard work. Those of us who are not married know how difficult it is to live as a decent Christian single. It is sad that for many Americans, unwed implies immoral. There are some who feel that if a guy or a girl is a bachelor, then somehow he or she has the right to live a "loose life". This is not the way of the Catholic who treasures the Divine Presence within him or her. In general, many people live through life as if going to an amusement park: eating, drinking, having fun hopping from one game to another. And when the day is done, they go home, getting bored and finding no meaning in life. They see nothing beyond life on this earth. **As Christians, we have to make an effort to fill life with meaningful, Christian experiences.** Those of us who are married will often say that it takes work for a marriage to be successful. This work is the work of the Lord when it involves His Love, Sacrificial Love. **We believe there is a purpose to life and a divine providence at work within us. Somehow the hand of God is in action weaving a pattern in and out of our lives, shaping our destiny.** It is God's world and he knows what he is doing with in. This is our belief - it is our faith. **Faith is a type of window we look through which helps us to see life from a viewpoint beyond this world, enabling us to take God at his word when he makes promises about the future and calls us to be his people in a special way.** Just like Abraham never knew where the road of life would take him but he believed that at the end of it he would meet God. **To have faith in Christ, we must live his life and do the works appointed by him, willing to expose ourselves to the wear and tear of caring for others. We are obligated to make the love of Christ real in other people.** Every day, we are given the opportunities of demonstrating our faithfulness as followers of Christ. We have to reach out to those in our office, our neighbourhood, our family, and let them realize that they are lovable to all people and to God. In this way we will be prepared and ready for the arrival of the master of the house at whatever hour he chooses to come.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. He will gird himself, have the servants recline at table, and proceed to wait on them. And should he come in the second or third watch and find them prepared in this way, blessed are those servants. The Lord is here. It is **not enough for us to just look busy. We have to be busy. And we have to trust in Him.** He will respond to our determination to live our faith by caring for us. There's a prayer my wife and I pray every day: ***"Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand"*** (Isaiah 41:10). Our faith must be bold and courageous, truly believing in the word of Christ. In this way, we live with no regrets, love with no limits. Our cross of surrender becomes the ladder to heaven. Faith helps us see the beauty and love of God in the daily struggles of our life. Our cross is our way to salvation. We don't know what the future holds for us but with faith, we know God will care for us and bring us home to Him someday. Amen