

BEING ALERT AND READY AT ALL TIMES

In 2019, Bishop Paul Mason of the Forces UK, led our seminary in the Holy Week celebrations. At the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday night, he told us a story that made a huge impact on me. Bishop Paul Mason who is a professional Scuba Diver, told us the trickiest part of passing the Scuba Diving Examination and being a good Scuba Diver. According to him, the trickiest part is saving the life of someone who is drowning and one has got to be alert and ready. Alertness and readiness are key here since emotions might be running high; however, that is the period the Scuba Diver has got to keep emotions in check and be thoroughly rational. According to Bishop Mason, when a Scuba Diver notices someone drowning, he/she must not jump in immediately to save the person. The reason for this is that the person drowning would initially be at the struggling stage, panting, kicking and grabbing anything and anyone that might be around; hence, that is not the right time to dive in to save the person even though everyone would like that to happen at that stage. The Scuba Diver has got to wait, be alert and ready to spot the time when the person drowning has stopped struggling and about to give up, then and only then would the Scuba Diver go into the water, grab the person without much struggles, bring him/her to the shore and revive them. The key here is being alert and ready to spot the exact time since bad timing could lead to the death of the person drowning and/or even the death of the Scuba Diver. It is this habitual attitude of alertness and readiness as well getting the time right, that we are faced with in this week's Sunday readings.

In our Gospel Pericope from Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus gave us a key characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven with a parable of the Ten Virgins – Five Wise and Five Foolish. That key characteristic of the kingdom of heaven is Alertness and Readiness which is couched in the warning – '**So stay awake**'. The Greek word used there is *Gregoreite* which comes from *Gregoreo* meaning to be attentively watchful of ourselves and events around us to avoid being taken unawares. *Gregoreite* pushes all rational and human boundaries so to speak. It means being alert and ready even when one is sleeping to avoid being taken unawares. It implies a person should not be busy doing another thing when he/she must be in constant alert of what is to come. Yes, one must be aware to avoid sudden calamity that might be thrown at him/her at any time. *Gregoreite* does not just mean being alert and ready preparing for death, not at all; robustly it means to be alert and ready everyday of our lives to avoid missed opportunities to serve God and others around us. It means being alert and ready to discover all the subtle ways the people around us, the social media and the different things we use and rely on might slowly but steadily lead us away from God, distract us from observing reality as objectively as possible as well as divert us from helping the vulnerable in our society and caring for our environment. Yes, being alert and ready is not optional module but compulsory habit.

For us to be alert and ready at all times, we all need one crucial gift of the Holy Spirit which we cannot acquire through any other means even if we are to read all the books in the world. That special gift of the Holy Spirit is Wisdom as today's First Reading from the book Wisdom enunciated. Yes, wisdom is seen by those who love her and found

by those who look for her. One group of people who sought and found wisdom are those we encountered in today's Second Reading from St Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. Yes, those who have died in Jesus are not just at peace, they will rise again at the end of time. They died in Jesus because while they were alive, they embraced the gift of Wisdom thereby remaining alert and ready that when the bridegroom arrived for the party, they followed Him into the banquet hall of heaven.

My friends, being alert and ready is so much needed in our world of today when our attention span is little and can easily be diverted to other things. However, experience and research have shown that human beings would be alert and ready to those things that are important to them. For instance, when **the film Oppenheimer was released in July 2023**, I was among those that watched it on the Big Screen in Southampton. I was shocked by the fact that the cinema was packed with no seats remaining, and for 3hrs, all of us were glued to the screen. Nobody slept and nobody left their seats because nobody wanted to miss any part of the film. In that same way, we must be alert and ready because everything around us is important and points to something more.

We need to be alert, ready and present to all the people around us and those the good Lord sends to us along our paths. In our world where people are busy with their own issues, we can easily overlook the so many people who need our presence and time. Although we live in a world where we are surrounded by so many gadgets, nothing can replace human contact and touch. Mother Teresa of Calcutta summed this up thus: **"The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved."** Let us be alert, ready and present to our neighbours, our parishioners and those on the margins of society who are looking up to us for help and assistance. Our presence might prolong the lives of so many lonely people in our world of today. Let us reach out to them.

We must not forget to be alert, ready and proactive about the world and our environment. There is so much abuse of the environment going on at the moment that we forget the environment we are abusing today will bite us harder in the future. We need to heed the cry of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* and *Laudate Deum*, that our world is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point; the repercussions would be felt in the healthcare and employment sectors as well as limited access to resources, housing and so on. Being alert and ready ensures we do our bit for the environment today so as to safeguard it for tomorrow.

My friends, as Bishop Paul Mason enlightened us above that saving the life of someone who is drowning involves being alert, ready and getting the time right spot-on, we are called today to be alert and ready at all times since we do not know the day or the hour. **BE PREPARED!!!**

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Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (12/11/2023)