

August 7, 2022

Father Ed's Sunday Reading

(continued)

First of all, he pictured a long and bright future before him. Secondly, he regarded the material wealth he had garnered for himself as the sign and the reward of a “successful” life. He also believed that all he possessed belonged exclusively to him. There are an awful lot of people who seem to think the same way – are we among them?

Jesus tells us today to be ready, to be ready when the Master comes. For all our care and precautions, there is absolutely no way we can know when or how the Master will come to call us to himself. Jesus says it will be like a thief in the middle of the night. We have probably all experienced having had something stolen from our house, our car, or even our person. In most cases, if we had known in advance, we could easily have thwarted the thief. Sometimes the theft was simply due to our not having taken the simplest of precautions but, after the theft had taken place, it was too late.

Jesus is warning us today about something much more important than the property we own, namely, the quality of our lives. Apparently, some people give top priority to the property they own. One can walk along roads in more affluent areas of a city where many of the houses can hardly be seen. They are hidden behind high walls topped with massive iron spikes. There are cameras monitoring movements 24 hours a day. As far as is humanly possible, nothing will be stolen from those houses. They are prepared for every eventuality – or are they?

Are they, are we, really ready to meet the Master when he comes? It is no use telling the God, “Lord, I have oodles in the bank, I have a lovely house in one of the most trendy suburbs, there is a Tesla for me and a Mercedes for my wife. My son is a prosperous surgeon in the States and my daughter a thriving lawyer in London...” Quite honestly, Jesus is not likely to be terribly impressed or interested in such a litany. The really important things have not yet been said.

Take a different example altogether. His name was John. He was a devout Catholic in China. Like thousands of others, he had remained true to his faith during the dark days of persecution in China and spent long years in prison purely and simply because of his belief in Jesus. Eventually he was released. His body was stooped from the years of ill treatment he had experienced. Then, one day while attending Mass at the shrine of St Francis Xavier in nearby Macau, he collapsed and died just after receiving communion.

Anyone who knew John, a man of no wealth whatever, knew that he was ready. His whole life had been lived in the company of Jesus. Jesus was all he had; Jesus was all he wanted.

Elsewhere in the Gospel Jesus makes this very plain. Those are his friends who have gone out of their way to share themselves and what they have (and not just their easily spared surplus) with the neediest of the needy – the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, those in prison...quite clearly only a sample list of those among us who are in need. Those who consistently make this their first priority in life are ready. They are no strangers to Jesus because they fully realise that “as often as you do it to the least of my brothers, you do it to me”.

Our life, too, as the Second Reading suggests, is like that of Abraham. It is a journey into the unknown and no amount of precautions or insurance can take away all uncertainty. “By faith, Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants...he set out without knowing where he was going.” We would love to have complete control and plans for our future life but it seldom works out like that. In fact, we, like Abraham, do not know where our life journey will lead us. We do know the final destination but we do not know how or when we will reach it.

The journey that the Scripture speaks about, of course, is not so much about travelling as about the style and quality and direction of our living. It includes every experience we will have and how we respond to each one. It will include the people we come face to face with – either by choice or by accident – and how we respond to them. We can see experiences and people as stepping stones to our own self-advancement, as many seem to do, or we can see them as opportunities to respond in truth and love and service to God entering our daily lives.

Life is a pilgrimage. It keeps moving. Abraham and his family “lived in tents while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God”. We would like to have gilt-edged securities for ourselves but our Christian faith offers us another programme. A life lived in love and service for the Kingdom of God, for a city – a society of justice and peace – designed and built by God. It is in doing this that we amass real wealth not only for ourselves but for others as well. By living like this, we are ready, at any time, to meet our Lord and Saviour. And when we do meet him we will know that all along we had lived with him in those we loved and served during our pilgrimage.