**Be on Guard, Keep Awake**

Grace, Mercy and Peace unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Today there have been quite a few people watching the weather forecast very closely. I'm sure there are some students hoping and praying for lots of snow and maybe a snow day on Monday.

---There are many times in life when we are very attentive to what is going on; important events: maybe a big trip, a new job, a date with your crush, the first day of school, a big party or your wedding, are indeed something to pay attention to. All of these are exciting to look forward to! ---Sometimes people even lose sleep in anticipation as they are so excited. ---I'm sure this has happened to each one of us at one time or another.

---As we celebrate the Last Sunday in the church year Jesus reminds us that we are to be attentive and excited! The great event of Jesus' return causes even more anticipation than all of those I just mentioned because we do not know when it will occur. **You do not know when the time will come**, that time of the return of **the Son of Man Who comes in clouds with great power and glory.**

You do not know, therefore, Christ says, **Be on guard, keep awake.**

Jesus told the first Christians that there will be signs and wonders in the heavens before that day. He said that the signs indicate that **He is near, at the very gates**. Indeed, the signs have occurred throughout history, especially in that first generation after Christ.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, recorded all sorts of ominous celestial phenomena like those described in our Gospel. All of those signs accompanied the last days prior to Jerusalem’s destruction. And in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and toppled the temple, not one stone was left standing upon another. That generation of Jews who witnessed Christ's death and resurrection also witnessed the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the dawning of a new age - A time of grace and forgiveness through Jesus.

The end of the temple was a small foretaste of the end of the world. Therefore Christ says, **Be on guard, keep awake. ---**We are in the Last Days. John the Apostle says in 1st John chapter 2 verse 18, "We know this is the last hour." ---We know it is the last hour because of the signs and because of Jesus' Word. **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.**

The day is surely drawing near; the Scripture cannot be broken. Jesus' Word is sure to come to pass. Revelation 22:12, **Behold, I am coming soon!** ---When He returns that is it, there are no second chances, no do-overs, the end. On that day "flames on flames shall ravage earth as Scripture long has warned us." For the evil generation Christ's return means destruction and condemnation. But for you who believe His return means restoration, resurrection and forever in paradise. Therefore Christ says, **Be on guard, keep awake.**

No one knows when Judgment Day is coming so we are to be prepared at all times. Isaiah the prophet says, **Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.** (Isaiah 55:6) This is precisely what you are doing, hearing His Word and seeking Jesus. Thanks be to God! You do not have to fear the end of the world because Jesus is near you.

---If you are not convinced that Christ's return is imminent then all you need to do is look at the earth which is passing away, look at the evil generation around you and consider your own life.

---No one knows when he will die. One day a man is healthy, the next he is sick. One day there is no cancer, the next the oncologist says "stage 4,” it's untreatable. One day the mind is sharp, the next, dementia and Alzheimer's has stolen your mind. Everything eventually falls apart so we ought to look to Christ and the resurrection with great anticipation and excitement.

---St. Augustine says, "When Christ tells us to watch for the Last Day, everyone should think of this as concerning his own last day; lest haply when you think the last day of the world to be far distant, you slumber with respect to your own last day."

That is to say, if you aren't concerned with Christ's return you should be, because no one knows when he will die! The Psalmist prays, **O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! ---**Therefore Christ says, **Be on guard, keep awake.**

---As I mentioned before, sometimes people lose sleep when they are in high anticipation of an important event. This is how all Christians should be, not that we lose rest on account of worry or terror of judgment, but that we are always alert and watchful.

What does this watchful anticipation look like? Let us take the example of Jesus and the Apostles in the garden of Gethsemane. As He was preparing to go to the cross and about to be betrayed by Judas, Jesus prayed, **"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death"** and He exhorted the Apostles, **"Keep watch!"** Again He prayed and urged them, **"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation!"**  And again, **after praying a third time, He said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come.**

On the Last Day of Jesus' life He was earnestly praying and entrusting Himself to God the Father. This is what it means to be on guard and keep awake. Yet the disciples fell asleep, they were exceedingly tired and weak and sinful. Still, Christ prayed for them. And Christ Prays for you!! Even as He faced His own death He was praying for His disciples. Jesus is truly awake and alert, His biggest concern is not Himself but what is the highest Good? What is the Father's Will? How might He save and deliver those whom He loves.

---On the other hand, to be spiritually asleep is to be careless, drunk, consumed with hatred, lust, greed and the worries of this life; lazy in matters of faith. Even the most on-point person, who is at the top of their class, who always does a good job at work, who is constantly busy, yet is apathetic to Jesus and His Word is spiritually asleep, dead in sin. ---Therefore Christ says, **Be on guard, keep awake.**

---If you are not avoiding the things that interfere with watchfulness you may be getting sleepy just like the Apostles. How sorrowful it is to consider the ways in which we have failed to keep awake.

---But Jesus did not fail. After praying, Jesus returned to the apostles and woke them up. And Jesus has awoken you! That you might be concerned with the highest good, seek God's will with Him, and love and serve your neighbor.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Jesus puts you on guard, on point. You are forgiven, awake and aware that there is evil all around. Therefore you are on guard, and you keep awake, striving after righteousness, believing Jesus' Word, avoiding sin and every temptation and commending yourself to God. ---To be steadfast, watchful and in prayer, is to believe in Jesus and trust His Word.

--- ---Not only did Jesus return to them in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus returned to them from the dead. He had taught them **that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.** ---And He kept His Word! When Christ died, the sun was darkened, darkness came over the whole land, and the earth was shaken. And after three days He kept His Word, He rose.

Knowing this, that Jesus has died and is risen, you are all the more vigilant, anticipating the Son of Man's return on the clouds. The same sort of signs that accompanied His death will mark His Second Advent. He will keep His Promise, He will return on the Last Day. Therefore Jesus says, **Be on guard and Stay awake.**

Thanks be to God, You are awake with the Apostles because Jesus has woken you up, and made you alive with Him through Holy Baptism.

---There are many important events to anticipate in this life, but the Last Day and Christ's return trumps them all.

 So I close with a few passages of Holy Scripture exhorting you to attentive excitement, eager anticipation of Christ's 2nd Advent, watchful faith.

1 Corinthians 16: 13,14 **Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.**

Ephesians 6:18 **Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, stay awake with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.**

1 Thessalonians 5:6 **So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.**

As we patiently await our Lord's return let us remain attentive and excited. As Jesus says, **Be on guard and Stay Awake.** Amen

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding guard and keep your hearts and minds awake in Christ Jesus. Amen