

Are You Ready?
Last Sunday of the Church Year
Mark 13:24–37

Dear Friends in Christ,

Humanity has a natural curiosity. As the ad for the tabloid says, "Inquiring minds want to know." For the most part, this is a good thing, although there are times when curiosity has gotten individual people into a lot of trouble.

Today's Bible readings produce a natural amount of curiosity. It is the last Sunday in the church year. It makes sense that we hear Bible readings about the Last Day on the Last Sunday of the Church Year. The topic of the Last Day triggers that natural curiosity and causes us to ask "Who, What, When, Why, Where, and How." We want to know everything, but God knows that it is better if we **don't** know everything.

Jesus firmly tells us that no one knows God's schedule for the Last Day. In fact, we hear this twice in today's Gospel and we hear it in other Scripture as well. Jesus even tells us that the angels don't know and even the Son of Man in His state of Humiliation does not know.

God's decision to hide these things combined with the natural curiosity of humanity and our sinful natures causes something strange to happen. In spite of all that God's Word says, there are people who insist that they know God's schedule for the Last Day.

I looked this up on the Internet just for fun. A wide variety of false prophets have selected thousands of dates for the end of the world. Some of them came before Jesus was even born. Many of the people who make these predictions claim to be Christians in spite of the fact that Jesus specifically told us that no one can know the time.

A few years ago, the end of the Mayan calendar was driving some people crazy. The descendants of the Mayans and others who study this stuff kept telling us that there is no meaning to the end of the Mayan calendar. The ancient Mayan numbering system just ran out of numbers. Nevertheless, there were some crazy people who made radical lifestyle choices assuming that the world would never reach the end of 2012. Well, again, the predictions failed.

Sadly, there are con artists out there who will use this sort of craziness to make a buck. Over time a great deal of money has changed hands because some were able to convince others that they

knew when Christ was returning. From time-to-time some poor souls have even given away all their earthly belongings and waited for Jesus to return. Then, when the day came and went, these people had no homes, no jobs, and no savings. It was all gone.

As incredible as these tragedies are, they are not the worst thing about these false prophets. For while people are obsessing over the time and itinerary of the end times, they are forgetting the important teaching in today's Gospel. Jesus said, *"Be on guard, keep awake. ... Therefore stay awake ... And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."* The important thing is to be ready when the Last Day comes.

The reason Jesus wants us to be ready is that there are two and only two eternal destinations on the Last Day – heaven and hell. Heaven is more blessing than we can imagine. Hell is more curse than we can imagine. The important thing is to avoid hell and enter heaven. It is not important to know more than that about heaven and hell. It is **not** important **when** the Last Day comes. It is just important to know that **it will come** one day, and the only way to be ready for that day is to be ready for it every day.

You see, when we are speculating about the nature of the Last Day – when it is – what it will be like – our attention is drawn away from preparing for it. What does it mean to be awake, to watch, to be ready?

You see, Jesus didn't die on the cross so that we could know the details of all the events on the Last Day. He died so that we could be **prepared** for the Last Day.

Preparation for the Last Day means that we must be holy in God's eyes. For only those people who are holy will enter the Kingdom of God. The Bible gives us two ways to be holy. One way depends on us. The other way depends on God.

The way that depends on us requires us to be perfect. There can be no mistakes, no slip-ups, no oopsies, no sorry-about-that's, we must be as perfect as God is. The slightest blemish, spot, wrinkle, or blot on our record, and we fail. It is all over. The test is a pass-fail exam. 100% passes. Anything else is a fail, done, over, next stop eternal torment. There are no appeals or do-overs. In all of time and space, there has been one and only one human being who has ever pulled this off. Every other human being fails this test at the moment of conception. As King David said, *[Psalm 51:5] "In sin did my mother conceive me."* So although God makes this way available, one and only one human being has been able to do it. It just isn't possible for the ordinary person.

The way that depends on God involves God the Father sending His only begotten Son into the world to **take our place as a human being under the law**. God's Son Jesus is perfect. With Him there **are no** mistakes, slip-ups, oopsies, or sorry-about-that's. Jesus has no blemish, spot, wrinkle, or blot. Jesus is the one and only human being who passed the test with a score of 100%. As the Apostle Peter said, ^[1 Peter 2:22-23] *"He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."* So God the Father sent His Son Jesus into the world and Jesus **became** the perfect human being for us.

On top of that, Jesus submitted to His Father and took up all our sins. He took up everything from the sins that we consider the worst to the sins that we don't even notice. As the Apostle Paul said, ^[2 Corinthians 5:21] *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* Jesus then took those sins to the cross where **He** suffered and died **for us**. As the Apostle Peter said, ^[1 Peter 2:24] *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."* This is the way that God makes us holy. This is the only way to be ready for the Last Day when it comes. Jesus Christ, God's Son must give His holiness to us and He offers that holiness to us from the cross.

Jesus did not remain among the dead. Instead, He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He has promised that He will return on the Last Day to raise all mankind from the dead just as He Himself rose from the dead on the third day. On that day there will be two reactions to His coming.

All those who attempted to produce their own holiness will find that God's presence is exceedingly painful. They will do anything to get away from God. The Bible describes this terror this way:

^[Revelation 6:15-17] *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

They will see the coming of Jesus and flee from His presence in terror. They will prefer the eternal punishment of hell to the presence of the living God.

Those who rest in the holiness of Jesus Christ – the holiness that **He** earned for us on the cross – these will see the Lord’s coming with rejoicing. They will join together with the church and rest in the love of God as the Bible says:

[Ephesians 5:25–27] Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

And again the Bible says:

[Revelation 21:3–4] “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

When we do a careful Bible study of all the signs of the end, we learn that they have all come to pass. There is no prophecy waiting to be fulfilled except the actual coming of the Last Day. For all we know, the Lord could reveal Himself before this service is over. On the other hand, we might be dead and buried for centuries before He returns. The Lord’s encouragement to us would be the same, *“Be on guard, keep awake. ... Therefore stay awake ... And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”* Be ready for the Last Day at any time.

It is not important to know the date of the Last Day. In fact, Jesus says that we can’t know that time. It is not important to know anything about the details of our eternal existence. The important thing is to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins that makes us constantly ready for the day when He will show Himself and raise the dead. Jesus urges us to be awake and on guard so that we will receive Him in joy – the joy that anticipates life forever with Him and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen