

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We hear these words from our Gospel reading again - **Luke chapter 12:40** “**You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**” So far the word of the Lord...

I don’t know if you are planning to make any New Year’s resolutions. Many people do. But how often do those resolutions quickly fall to the wayside? Sure you might start out strong, determined to stick with it, but then you fail. Down and defeated you begin to treat the new year like any other. But consider this - “**the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect**” (Lk **12:40**). This year may not be like any other. It could be your last. We don’t know the day or the hour. Jesus asked His hearers to imagine the slaves of a household who were waiting for their master to return home from a wedding reception. In that day and age, there were no means of instant communication. The slaves learned what time their master was coming home when he showed up at the door and knocked. We know the day is coming, so we would do well to heed Christ’s admonition to “Be ready”.

In November we came to the close of the Church Year. The Scripture readings then, as well as those in Advent, brought to mind the second coming of Christ, the End Times, Final Judgement. We recently celebrated Christmas - when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. If you heard my sermon from Christmas Day - you know that Christ continues to dwell among us in Word and Sacrament. But there are those who do not receive Him. Yes, there are some who reject this message. There are some who live as though they will never die - as though Jesus will never return. Some think they are immune to dying. Disasters resulting in death (e.g. fatal car accidents, cancer, etc.)

happen to other people, not them. They still have lots of time. Other things are more urgent. Jesus is not going to return for a long time. Death is far off. Don't fall into this error. Rather, with the Psalmist let us pray, Lord **“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12).**

There are those who may choose to delay. Perhaps you've heard stories of people who waited to be baptized until they were on their deathbeds - with the thought: *“Perhaps now I will die with a clean slate. There's not much time left for me to screw things up.”* This is the wrong attitude to have dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Baptism is one of God's gifts - who would not desire to receive such a gift? To delay is to despise God's gift!

In Baptism you are clothed in Christ's righteousness. **“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks” (Lk 12:35-36).** Stay dressed for action - this more literally could be translated as “Let your loins be girded”. You may have heard Pastor describe what this means in Bible Study before. It's when you take your cloak and tuck it into your belt so that you're ready for action. But did you hear the way I said it? “Let your loins be girded” There are two things I'd like to note here.

First - this is a passive action - Let it happen to you! How? Receive Christ - He offers Himself freely to you in Word and Sacrament. Christ is the one who girds our loins! We are not truly ready for Judgment Day unless we are ready in faith in Christ! Baptism is God's work, not man's. The Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the

faith! God is the one who has given you faith. Believe and trust that you are ready for the Last Day because Christ has made you ready! How are your loins girded? How are you prepared for action? In faith! And faith is a gift that has been given to us. Remember what St Paul teaches us:

- **(Rom 10:17) “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”**
- **(Eph 2:8-9) “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works”**

The second thing I would like to note is another grammatical point. “Let your loins be girded” - this is the perfect tense. It happened in the past and is ongoing to the present. Daily we repent and confess our sins in faith. Daily we live in our Baptism. Daily the old Adam is drowned and dies along with all sins and evil desires. Daily a new man emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Daily our loins are girded. In faith, the gift given to us by God, we are ready for Christ to come again!

But what about when our faith is weak? Are we still ready? Luke tells us **“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them” (Lk 12:37)**. Weak faith is still faith. Christ Himself prepares us and strengthens our faith through the meal He serves to us. Jesus offers us the forgiveness of sins in His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. In fact, *Christ instituted this supper particularly for Christians who are weak in faith but repentant, to comfort them and to strengthen their weak faith. We believe, teach, and confess that the entire worthiness of the guests at the table of his heavenly meal is and consists alone in the most holy obedience and perfect merit of Christ. We make His obedience and merit our own through true faith,*

*concerning which we receive assurance through the sacrament. Worthiness consists in no way in our own virtues, or in internal or external preparations.* (FC Ep VII 19-20) Yes, this meal is given to you to strengthen your faith. This is where God reminds us that when it comes to our salvation, He does all the work. We are prepared for the end because He prepares us.

Who can guarantee that this new year will not be your last? So very often we fail in our resolutions. We forget our promises. We may have resolved to follow Jesus more seriously, only to be dashed by sin, death, and devil. With Paul we cry out **“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”** But **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** (Romans 7:24–25). Jesus told the disciples **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you,”** (John 15:16). God revealed the only way we can please Him when He testified about Christ, **“This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”** (Matt 3:17). It is only in Christ that the Father is well pleased. Dear brothers and sisters - you are in Christ. St. Paul offers this assurance in Romans chapter 8: **“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”** (Rom 8:33-35) No! None of these things shall separate us from the love of Christ. **“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom 8:37-39).

We start the new year in the right way when we begin it in faith in Christ, because then we are also completely equipped to meet the future. “Be ready,” says our Savior and Lord. We, His people, taking leave of one year and walking into the next, cry out to him: “*O Lord, you alone can make us ready. Fix our eyes on you in this new year, on the hope that you have laid before us in heaven, on the blessings you continue to serve us in your church.*” In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.