

HOMILY - 19th SUN. OF ORDINARY [C] **{Expect the Unexpected}**

I am Deacon Mike Grzeca, newly assigned to St. Martin of Tours Parish. I am very happy to be given the privilege of serving you. I have put a few pieces of information about me in the bulletin, and I look forward to meeting all of you as time goes on, starting with the picnic.

Today's Readings are about expecting the unexpected. How does one do that? Isn't the unexpected also the unknown?

When I was a teenager, (and I am the oldest of 15 kids) we kids had the job of cleaning the house on Saturday morning while our parents did the grocery shopping. Why it took two of them to shop, I had no idea at the time - now I know they also needed some time away. In any event, we were supposed to get the cleaning done before they came home. Well, you can imagine what all went on, besides cleaning, for the next couple of hours. And we were always surprised and thrown into a sudden panic, when we hadn't finished, and here came their car driving up the street. Expect the unexpected!

Jesus uses parables in today's Gospel to tell his followers to be ready, be vigilant! But, be ready for what, exactly? Is Jesus asking us to stay awake and give up doing everything else? Are we to be fearful because the end may come sooner than we think? As Peter asked, is he talking to us?

Yes, Jesus is talking to us, and I think there are three points to what he is saying. First, as the song says, we are to walk by faith and not by sight. This means that because of our faith and hope in the Lord God, even though we do not know the details of the future, we do "know" the future. As believers, we know that if we take up our cross and follow Jesus that we will one day be with him forever. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us, faith is the realization of what is hoped for, not what is seen. If we could experience heaven on earth, we would not need faith. If we could see the end of our journey, we would know when to start getting ready. Because we cannot, we walk through this life by faith. And the fact that we are on a journey implies that we are only

pilgrims here. In effect, we are walking toward the expected; what is unexpected is when we will arrive.

The second element going on in this Gospel passage is that change is the one constant in life, and though unexpected, should instead always be expected. Change came to Abraham when he was 75 and God called him to leave his home, which he never saw again. Change came to his wife Sarah when she was very old and gave birth to a son. Change came to a man named Saul on the road to Damascus. Change happens to all of us and usually, it's not a welcome thing. But the changes of life also present us with opportunities we otherwise would never have had. They can twist us around but they can also lift us up to higher ground. They can help turn us toward the One that never changes; to God the one who constantly loves us. The fact that God does not change, and is a refuge for us on this journey helps us deal with the unexpected changes of life.

How does the fact that God doesn't change help us to expect the unexpected? In a society driven by role models who are football players, supermodels or rock stars, and in an economy that stubbornly refuses to rebound while debate becomes ever more shrill and toxic, there is one source who is not looking for our money, our job or our family time. God created us out of love for us, so that one day we might be with God forever. This is a constancy we can cling to in the face of all the changes in our lives.

The third element in what Jesus is saying in today's Gospel is that we are to follow Jesus and live as he would want us to live. This is in fact, is the key to being ready for the unknown. How are to live until the end of our pilgrimage? Some believe it is every one for themselves and we should get all we can because life is short. Others put it on their families and say that all the hours away at work are necessary so that the family can have nice things. Some say it doesn't matter how we live here because there is nothing after we die.

Those who believe in Jesus know that there is more than this life. We know that there is an afterlife that is in large part determined by how we have lived our lives here. But life here can be difficult and sometimes complicated. Since most people cannot go off and become hermits, how are we supposed to follow the Lord?

The answer lies in changing our focus. Instead of trying to be a great saint, or chucking it all because it's just a fantasy, we must live in our various communities and families the same way Jesus related to other people. His way was not the way of judgment, demonizing, labeling or dismissing. His way was the way of humility, gratitude, gentleness and forgiveness. He didn't keep score or use people for his own agenda; he accepted people as they were and sought to build up what was good in them.

When we live as Jesus would want us to live, we begin by admitting who we truly are – this is called humility. We see other people as also carrying the spark of the divine God within them, and if they cross us, we forgive them and pray for them. When we live as Jesus would want us to live, we are grateful for what we have, and out of that gratitude, we seek to share our blessings with others. When we live as Jesus would want us to live, we have only one thing we worship, and it isn't money, technology or fame; it's the God who loves us.

So, we return to the words of Our Lord to the disciples: "You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of God will come." We cannot know that hour, but we can and do know it will happen. Why take the risk of getting back to God later? Why make excuses for putting other things before God?

The truth is that if we are already "ready" by living as Jesus has taught us, then we are actually ready for that unexpected moment when the Lord beckons us to walk into eternity.

Let us pray that God will give us the strength to remain faithful and to follow Jesus on earth, so that we may one day walk with him in heaven.

It's never too late – get ready!