

# Ambassadors of the Faith:

## *Sharing the Light and the Love of Christ*

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### **“Blessed is that Servant whom He Shall Find Waiting”**

#### *An Exhortation to Vigilance*

A Sermon by Fr. William Chiganos

“Be dressed in readiness,” Jesus begins in Luke 12, “and keep your lamps alight” (v. 35), because at any moment, He can step through the door of history and return to us for good. As His bride, will we be eagerly waiting for Him? Will He find a ready home and a tender, welcoming heart?

Or will He return to an empty, run-down house, where people grew tired of waiting and moved somewhere else? -- A place where the people He loved forgot all about Him? Will He find joy or uneasy surprise?

Jesus, of course, would rather find joy. Let’s look again at His counsel in verse 35, so we can live in bright anticipation instead of trembling dread: “*Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight.*”

In Greek, this verse begins with an emphatic use of the personal pronoun *you*. Jesus is talking to each of us. “You who worry and fear, you who cling to your fading possessions, you make yourself ready. Take your eyes off the world and focus on me.”

So how can we do this? Jesus gives us two word pictures. First, in His day, when people “dressed in readiness,” they gathered their outer robes and tucked them into their belts. In this way they could travel or tend the horses or cook a meal unhindered. Their clothes revealed their ready-to-work mindset, the same mindset Jesus wants to see in us.

Such an image evokes memories of my very first visit to a monastery on Mount Athos. The monks were engaged in their respective work duties and each of them took care to gather their robe and tuck it under their belt, thereby allowing them to complete their task unhindered. This was especially true for the monks at work in the kitchen or tending their crops in the field.

Jesus’ second picture is in the command, “Keep your lamps alight.” In other words, keep the home fires burning. Even today, leaving a light on means someone is expected. It reveals a watchful, welcoming attitude. When Jesus returns, He doesn’t want to arrive at a dark house while we yawn and fumble for the light switch. He wants to know that we’ve prepared a place for Him and are looking forward to His coming.

Now what exactly does it mean to “keep ready”? Does Christ expect us to sit at home, anxiously wringing our hands and peering out the window? No – He wants us to get out and do His will in the world.

When I have had the occasion to be absent from our house in the late hours of the day, I am always comforted as I approach the darkened road to see a light burning at the end of the block. That signals that someone who is very special in my life is waiting for me.

The first three evenings of Great Week are devoted to the Service of the Bridegroom – the *Nymphios*. Though the term comes from the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the theme for Monday evening's service, it is applied to all three. The theme of watchfulness is present in all three services.

Each evening we hear the hymn: *Behold the Bridegroom sets forth in the dead of night. And blessed is that servant whom he shall find on watch; unworthy the one he shall come upon lazing. Look to yourself, soul, that sleep does not overtake you, lest you be given up to death and be shut out of the kingdom. Be sober then, and sing out: Holy, holy holy are You, our God; through the prayers of the Theotokos save us.*"

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to watch and pray. They all succumbed to sleep and were not prepared to be at Jesus' side during those agonizing and painful moments of His arrest, humiliation and pain.

There is praise for the servant who is ready. No man can tell the day or the hour when eternity will invade time and the summons will come. How, then, would we like God to find us?

We would like Him to find us with our work completed. Throughout my years of learning, I tried to do my best to please the instructors. But oh how I dread the memory of those moments when a class paper was returned with the word "incomplete" stamped on it. Thus in life, we should strive to complete our work. Jesus Himself said, "I have accomplished the work which you have given me to do" (John 17:4). No man should ever lightly leave undone a task he ought to have finished.

Procrastination is dreadful. It creeps into our lives and disrupts the harmony of life. It is something we all encounter from time to time. It has been stated that we tend to divide life into compartments. There is the part in which we remember that God is present; and there is a part in which we never think of Him at all. There is nothing so fatal as to feel that we have plenty of time. Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent us while it is day; night comes when no one can work" (John 9:4).

William Barclay writes, "Sin is doubly sinful to the man who knew better; failure is doubly blameworthy in the man who had every chance to do well."

The admonition given to all faithful at the Service of the Bridegroom give us a sense of urgency: *Why so indifferent, miserable soul? Why do you appear heedless and uncaring at such a time? Why do you busy yourself with transient things? The end time is upon us, and we shall soon be parted from earthly concerns. While you yet have time, turn sober and confess: I have sinned against You, my Saviour; do not cut me down like the barren fig tree, but as the compassionate Christ, have pity on me as I cry out in awe: May we not be shut out of the bridal chamber!"*

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