

Be Prepared  
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In case you forgot where we live and what's coming, you need only think back to the end of this past week. All you had to do was step outside and the Arctic blast hit you square in the face. Friday was not a good day to be in and out of the car yet that's what my day was like. Mind you, the trips were all good: a monthly Mass at Timber Hills, coffee with a friend who is moving out of the area, lunch with a close priest friend, and an anointing at Woodwinds Hospital. Wonderful things were happening in my life – I just wish it had been a little warmer. So, yes, we live in Minnesota and winter is coming. Which means it won't be long before we start hearing the emergency weather alerts. Which means we need to be prepared for what's coming.

Before I go on, let me tell you a couple stories, one true and one maybe not so true but more likely urban legend. The first comes from the sinking of the Titanic. A frightened woman found her place in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered into the raging North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they cast off. She was granted three minutes or they would leave without her.

She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous angle. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly pushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in.

That seems pretty incredible because thirty minutes earlier she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over the smallest diamond. But death had boarded the Titanic. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment she preferred three small oranges to a crate of diamonds.

The second story is about St. Charles Borromeo, whose feast was last Saturday. It seems that one evening he was playing cards with a few of his friends and the subject got around to death and dying. What would you do, it was asked, if all of a sudden it were revealed that you were going to die this very night?

One person said: "I'd run off to confession." Another said: "I'd get down on my knees and pray." A third said: "I would find my lawyer and make sure my will was in good order." Charles kept silent, continuing to look at his cards. Eventually, remarking on his lack of response, one of his friends asked him what he would do. "I'd continue to play cards," was his reply. You see, he was ready at any time. And maybe that's what a saint does – prepares. But it shouldn't take someone like St. Charles to be prepared. Jesus tells all of us to be prepared.

Fr. Joe Robinson suggests that in today's parable, we would rather our Lord had told us the master of the house said to the late comers "Come on in." But He didn't. They missed out because they weren't prepared. Just like the story of the prodigal son, God is always ready to welcome us back if we are willing to change our ways. Yet, in today's parable, we are warned that we don't know the day or the hour.

Fr. Joe also tells a story that I've heard before. It's about an architect who worked for a company for most of his adult life. One day the company gave him a \$1,000,000 budget and commissioned him to build a beautiful house. Rather than use the best materials, he decided that since he would be out of the business in a short time, he would use poor materials and did a job that was substandard in many ways.

When he finished the job, he was told the house was his, in appreciation for all his years of service. Fr. Joe uses that story as a reminder that, whether we know it or not, we are building our own futures.

When we really want something we look forward to it, we prepare for it. We make sure we do everything necessary to make it happen. Shouldn't we apply the same diligence to our salvation? Shouldn't we be prepared? It would certainly seem so.