

“I Told You So!”

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” That’s the warning Jesus gives us in today’s Gospel concerning our preparedness for when he returns. Keep that in mind as I tell you this story.

Many years ago, Al Capone virtually owned Chicago. Capone wasn't famous for anything heroic. He was notorious for enmeshing the windy city in everything from bootlegged booze and prostitution, to murder. Capone had a lawyer nicknamed 'Easy Eddie.' He was Capone's lawyer for a good reason. Eddie was very good! In fact, Eddie's skill at legal maneuvering kept 'Big Al' out of jail for a long time. To show his appreciation, Capone paid Easy Eddie very well. Not only was the money big, but Eddie got special dividends as well. For instance, he and his family occupied a fenced-in mansion with live-in help and all of the conveniences of the day. The estate was so large that it filled an entire downtown Chicago city block. Eddie lived the high life of the Chicago mob, and gave little consideration to the atrocities that went on around him. Eddie did have one soft spot, however. He had a son that he loved dearly. Eddie saw to it that his young son had clothes, cars, and a good education.

Nothing was withheld. Price was no object. And, despite his involvement with organized crime, Eddie even tried to teach his son right from wrong. Eddie wanted his son to be a better man than he was. Yet, with all his wealth and influence, there were two things he couldn't give his son; he couldn't pass on a good name or a good example. One day, Easy Eddie reached a difficult decision. Easy Eddie wanted to rectify the wrongs he had done. He decided he would go to the authorities and tell the truth about Al 'Scarface' Capone, clean up his tarnished name, and offer his son some semblance of integrity. To do this, he would have to testify against The Mob, and he knew that the cost would be great. So, he testified. Within the year, Easy Eddie's life ended in a blaze of gunfire on a lonely Chicago Street. But, in his eyes, he had given his son the greatest gift he had to offer, at the greatest price he could ever pay. Police removed from his pockets a rosary, a crucifix, a religious medallion, and a poem clipped from a magazine. The poem read:

"The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power  
to tell just when the hands will stop, at late or early hour.  
Now - is the only time you own. Live, love, toil with a will.  
Place no faith in time. For the clock may soon be still."

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Jesus was telling this in reference to his return, but Easy Eddie knew this applied to every day life situations. If we are planning to live a better life, a life of integrity, compassion, generosity, we can’t wait,

for you know neither the day nor the hour.

In the entire scheme of things a very small percentage of humanity will be on earth when Jesus returns. Most of us will enter into God's heavenly kingdom through the more conventional method of death. And since very few of us know when our death will come. Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

There is another story I would like to tell you. World War II produced many heroes. One such man was Lieutenant Commander Butch O'Hare. He was a fighter pilot, assigned to the aircraft carrier Lexington, in the South Pacific. One day his entire squadron was sent on a mission. After he was airborne, he looked at his fuel gauge and realized that someone had forgotten to top off his fuel tank. (Hmmm... kinda like the unwise virgins at the wedding.) He would not have enough fuel to complete his mission and get back to his ship, so his flight leader told him to return to the carrier. Reluctantly, he dropped out of formation and headed back to the fleet.

As he was returning to the mother ship, he saw something that turned his blood cold; a squadron of Japanese aircraft was speeding its way toward the American fleet. The American fighters were gone on a mission, and the fleet was all but defenseless. He couldn't reach his squadron and bring them back in time to save the fleet. Nor could he warn the fleet of the approaching danger. There was only one thing to do. He must somehow divert the Japanese from the fleet. Laying aside all thoughts of personal safety, he dove into the formation of Japanese planes. Wing-mounted 50 caliber machine guns blazed as he charged in, attacking one surprised enemy plane and then another. Butch wove in and out of the now broken formation and fired at as many planes as possible until all his ammunition was gone. But he continued the assault. He dove at the planes, trying to clip a wing or tail in hopes of damaging as many enemy planes as possible, making them unfit to fly. Finally, the frustrated Japanese squadron retreated in another direction.

Deeply relieved, Butch O'Hare and his tattered fighter plane limped back to the carrier. Upon arrival, he reported in and related the event surrounding his return. The film from the gun-camera mounted on his plane told the entire story. It showed the extent of Butch's daring attempt to protect his fleet. He had destroyed five enemy aircraft. This took place on February 20, 1942. And, for that action, Butch became the Navy's first Ace of W.W.II, and the first Naval Aviator to win the Congressional Medal of Honor.

A year later Butch was killed in aerial combat at the age of 29. His home town would not allow the memory of this WWII hero to fade, and today, O'Hare Airport in Chicago is named in tribute to the courage of this great man. So, the next time you find yourself at O'Hare International Airport, give some thought to visiting Butch's memorial, displaying his statue and his Medal of Honor. It's located between Terminals 1 and 2.

Butch O'Hare's parents must have been people of honor and integrity to raise such a courageous son. You might be interested to learn that Butch O'Hare - was 'Easy Eddie's' son.

“Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” None of us know what is in store for us in this life. If it wasn't for Easy Eddie changing his ways, Butch O'Hare may not have been the man of integrity that he had become.

Back in Medieval times there was an interesting view of Baptism. Yes, they believed that Baptism washed away the power of sin. But many misunderstood the theology of Baptism, and thought that sins committed after baptism were not forgiven. So some would gamble with their promise of Salvation, and wait until they were near their dying breath to be Baptized. This belief might work if you knew when you were going to die. But Jesus warns us, “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Christ challenges us to Be Prepared throughout our life for when he returns, or for whatever challenges that may come to us. Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.... when the Economy may fall apart - or when our employment may end - or when an illness may attack us - or when a terrorist strike may occur or - when Christ may return.

The apostles and the whole early church expected Christ to return soon. They anticipated the appearance of Jesus, like we anticipate the appearance of the bridegroom whenever we gather for a wedding. Christ's return was not perceived as something that *might* happen; it was a certainty that was expected to occur at any time, any day, any hour. Early Christians prepared for the second coming of Christ, and they waited with excitement. They experienced a sense of urgency as they waited to see Jesus again.

But now, many years have passed. In fact, nearly 2,000 years have gone by, and still, Jesus has not returned. Many Christians have lost the sense of urgency. Many of us seldom even *think* about the return of Christ. That urgency felt by the early Christians turned into disappointment and even disillusionment when they began seeing persecution and death, even of Jesus' original disciples. They had understood Jesus to say that his followers would not die before he returned. So urgency turned into disappointment, which gave way to doubt, which finally gave way to indifference. The second coming of Christ seems to be taking so long that many of us rarely even think about it anymore.

How often do you think about the end of this world? Do you ever imagine what it will be like? Do you look forward to it? Or are you afraid of it? Do you even care whether or not it comes in your lifetime? IF Christ returns during our lifetime and we are not ready, we'll have no excuse, and Jesus would be valid in saying: “I TOLD YOU SO!” “Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Amen