

April 5 Message from Fr. David

"What does it mean to watch and pray?"

Answer: Jesus used the phrase "watch and pray" on a couple of different occasions. Once was the night before the crucifixion. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed that "this cup be taken from me" (Matthew 26:39). After the prayer, He found His disciples sleeping. He was grieved that they could not even pray with Him for an hour and warned them to "watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).



Another occurrence of the phrase "watch and pray" is found earlier in Jesus' ministry when He prophesied about the end times. Luke chapter 21 details many of those events, and Jesus warns that they would happen suddenly: "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34). He then says, "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (verse 36).

"Watch and pray." The word translated "watch" means "to have the alertness of a guard at night." A night watchman must be even more vigilant than a daytime guard. In the daytime, danger can often be spotted from a distance. But in the night everything is different. A night watchman must use senses other than sight to detect danger. He is often alone in the darkness and without the defenses he would otherwise employ. There may be no indications of enemy attack until it happens, so he must be hyper-vigilant, suspecting it at any moment. That is the type of watching Jesus spoke about.

Jesus warned us that we are too easily distracted by the physical and will be caught unaware if we do not continually discipline ourselves. In the Garden of Gethsemane, sleepiness overcame the disciples. Their physical need overpowered their desire to obey Him. He was grieved when He saw this, knowing what was ahead for them. If they did not remain spiritually vigilant, in tune with Him (John 15:5) and ready to deny the flesh, they would be overcome by the evil one (1 Peter 5:8).

Jesus' disciples today must also watch and pray. We are easily distracted by this world, our fleshly needs and desires, and the schemes of the enemy (2 Corinthians 2:11). When we take our eyes from Jesus and His soon return, our values begin to shift, our attention wanders, and soon we are living like the world and bearing little fruit for God's kingdom (1 Timothy 6:18-19). He warned us that we must be ready at any moment to stand before Him and give an account of our lives (Romans 14:12; 1 Peter 4:5; Matthew 12:36).

“Watch and pray.” We can only remain faithful when we are devoted to prayer. In prayer, we continually allow God to forgive us, cleanse us, teach us, and strengthen us to obey Him (John 14:14). In order to keep watch, we must pray for endurance and freedom from distractions (Hebrews 12:2; Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18). We must pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). When we live with the eager expectation of the Lord’s return and expect persecution until then (2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 24:9; 1 Peter 4:12), we are more likely to keep our lives pure and our hearts ready to meet Him.

Can we spend one hour in watch at the Altar of Repose with Jesus? We will have that chance as the Maundy Thursday service comes to an end. I pray that you will sign up on the “Watch Board” in the narthex to spend even one hour through the night. Even if you do not sign up, Christ’s invitation to come and watch is open to any of us. Seating will be placed and reading and praying material will also be available to help stimulate your prayers as you sit and watch at the Altar of Repose in the back of the nave.

With Holy Week upon us, it is my sincerest wish that you can find the time to worship at as many of the evening services as you can while we make our walk with Jesus to Jerusalem and experience in spirit his betrayal, passion, crucifixion and glorious resurrection. All services, Monday through Saturday begin at 7:pm. On Maundy Thursday there will be an Agape Meal that begins before the service starting at 6:pm.

Blessings, **Fr. David**