

A dramatic picture appeared in a newspaper some time ago. It was of a young man dead from a drug overdose in his car parked besides a parking meter that read "time expired".

But so too is my clock expiring. I will be 74 next birthday and due to retire at 75. I have a house ready. But for all of you, even if you are fit and active and travelling the world on the Lord's mission your clock is also ticking. No wonder Jesus says "Stay awake".

Sometimes I have seen magnet stickers in religious bookshops that say "Jesus is coming back. Look busy". Today's Gospel affirms that he will return for each of us.

Back in the summer I attended the death bed of a dear parishioner, a young man with a young family. As we gathered around the bed we did more than say the traditional prayers the family got out their phones and with the music we found there sang some favourite songs and hymns. Words that were very familiar had new significance. Words that would otherwise seem trite and tunes well known became alive for us all. As at the funeral mass itself we were aware that coping with death was a part of life. Most people only face this later on not when they are young

So how do we prepare for death? There is way except by living well.

This Advent season that begins today is a reminder about what it means to live well. We must live as if Jesus has just died for us, has risen and is coming back for us. We need remember that God loves us and at some time he will call for us. Will be ready? Will we allow him to be the potter and we the clay?

Advent is a time when we preside over the reinvention of ourselves. We try to climb out of our patterns of sin and in many places there are special reconciliation services with opportunity for confession. In Deaneries and parishes people gather with their priests to be reconciled to the Lord in spite of the busy demands of parties and celebrations before Christmas. There will be some who will not take advantage of the opportunity to change. Change and growth frighten everyone.

John Powell, the famous Jesuit and spiritual writer, once wrote, "God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, a special song to sing for others, a special act to bestow". Were a scientist to warn us that an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale was approaching we would take every precaution we could. Yet Jesus prediction of his eventual return does not challenge us to change our lives.

If we do not prepare for his return then we know there will be consequences. We know already there are troubles. The increasing disunity in the world, the rise of politicians and leaders who gain power because their appeal to narrow selfish interests. Global warming and abuse of the environment these are all signs that we live in a time of instability outside of God's ordering. But no one and no society is past change. George Bernard Shaw was trimming a tree at 96 and fell and broke his leg. Michaelangelo was 71 when he began painting the Sistine Chapel.

No one is too old to accept life's challenges. Yesterday has happened and we have our memories but now is the time to prepare for eternity. Now is the time to stay awake. John Lindberg flew across the Atlantic in a different way to Ben In 1927 he flew solo from New York to Paris in 33 hours. To prepare himself he stayed awake all night as long as he could in the days before and often refused to go to bed. This is the attitude Christ would have us have. We are to stay awake because we don't know when Christ is coming for us. Here are some suggestions to start a radical change in our lives: Help someone who is sick and needy, Comfort someone who is troubled, and Stand up for someone treated unfairly. Reconcile with someone with whom you have tangled, Smile at someone and see that smile come back to you. Wish someone a good day and help make it so for them.

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