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LAT 971

Notes of Sermon preached by
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on Sunday Evening. November 4.1973.

Lesson. Mark 13.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Matthew 26. 41.

Our beloved Saviour used the occasion of the sleeping of the inner circle of His chosen disciples, who were within yards of Him in His agony in the garden when they slept for sorrow,- which was not culpable; He used the occasion to enforce on His dear people in all ages of the Church's history the importance of His watchword, committed to them in His very Passion. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Then He acknowledged with all graciousness, and the word really astonishes me and fills me with gratitude and praise,- He acknowledged His delight in that our spirits are willing. I am persuaded in my soul that the majority of those who come here for divine worship and adoration recognise that in their own souls their spirits are willing. What? To love, serve, obey, delight in Him: willing to be separated from a dying world within and without: willing to renounce all the works of the devil and the lusts of the flesh,- a sweet willingness.

I feel my extreme limitations and measurable lack of grace, but from my childhood I possessed as a divine gift and blessing a willing spirit. See the delight the dear Lord has in putting His seal on it and sweetly taking notice of it. O you may feel you are a poor wretch and you have greatly failed. Your life is a failure in many ways: when you look back on your life it appears to be a tragedy. You write failure against it,- as a husband, wife, mother, father, Church member, minister, deacon; failure. But I am sure you are able to appreciate and measurably claim that your spirit is willing. The trouble is, your flesh is sinfully weak it always obstructs you; it obtrudes; it is always belligerent, striving to gain the mastery, to entangle and divert you.

Are you able to postulate that your spirit is willing? and what about the flesh that is weak? I think as I have quoted, it was the great Rabbi Duncan referred to the fact that it was not to lie on a bed of ease but of thorns. You know the difference: can you excuse yourselves? Can you rest on your bed and say; "It is easy. The flesh is weak: the Bible says so; Christ says so concerning His disciples."? Never, if grace is in exercise. It will be a bed of thorns. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7.24) Well do we know the flesh is weak.

So are you able to take up the two positions? First, you know your spirit is willing. You want to pray, to live to the glory of God, to do what is right, to live holily and righteously all your days,- not by way of merit, but because this is the principle of holiness that motivates you. Your willingness goes as far as this; if you could you would live without another sin, You would never more grieve the Spirit. Your spirit is willing. This is the gift of God. The Lord will bless you and you will never sink. The Lord knows your spirit is willing. For this we bless God for His omniscience; this is a comfort and joy to us. He looks through all the mire of our corrupt nature and sees a sweet, godly, willing spirit, and this He acknowledged concerning the three sleeping disciples. St. Luke tells us why they were sleeping. It did not appear to be a blameworthy sleep: it was not slothfulness or indifference; they slept for sorrow. Their participation in sympathy with Christ in what He suffered overcame all their senses and powers and they slept for sorrow. The preacher knows what it is to sleep for sorrow. You may think it is impossible. If you are in vital contact with a dear one in deepest suffering you do not sleep at all. After days and nights of vigil your whole person is overwhelmed with the magnitude and depth of suffering and there is a point where nature succumbs to sleep.

I should like to turn it the other way and say to you, your Saviour never slept for sorrow. No; His eyelids never sleep. In all His agony in the garden, at the pillar, on the cross, His eyelids never slept. The pathos of the cross in one particular point is almost too touching for

words. He looked down from the cross in all His agony and saw His dear mother beholding Him and the disciple He loved, - John. He knew the prophecy of Simeon was being fulfilled in her; Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." and her soul was tortured; the sword was piercing through, and Christ knew. Think of the pathos, the tenderness in the midst of all His agony, unparalleled agony on every level; agony of body; agony of His holy soul. He thought of her so lovingly. He thought of her need in providence and grace, and He said; "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." He thought of her domestic ^{need} she would have of solace and He provided for her in all His agony, and He remembered you. This is enough to break your heart.

So He used the occasion of their overwhelming which was not a sleep of indifference, though you read into it in your own case. You read it in relation to Christ, to His saints. I will tell you as well as I can in what way. For instance, the glorious truth of Christ's Passion is to be spiritually remembered every day; not once a month. Daily, nightly we are to think of Him approaching and entering the gloomy garden, His betrayal, His appearing before Pontius Pilate and being delivered to the Roman soldiers, His scourging at the pillar, taking up His cross which was afterwards carried by another, His crucifixion and agony. What do you read into the matter of sleeping? I will show you in what way, Every scene, every act of life, every occasion of life, whether it is something personal in solitude or in a community, you will place it against the background of His Passion. If you jest and you fear God, presently you will see a suffering Saviour and you will say; "I am guilty." I am not presenting this to you therefore, as an occasional thing: it is the whole of your life. Does my behaviour, my speech, my frivolity harmonise with the Passion of Christ? How soon is a poor sinner inebriated by many things! Does my behaviour correspond? Does my speech, my behaviour of last week correspond with my profession of union and communion with Christ and Him crucified? Have I behaved acceptably, reverently, godly, in view of His Passion? These are blessed exercises of soul. What

clearing of yourselves this will work!

One other point emerges. You will read into sleeping, preoccupation, and this is a difficult matter and a narrow line,- preoccupation with material things. I tried to pray about this. There are so many levels: a young man or a maiden has talents, and study is excellent and it goes on all through life. If you wish to maintain a position you must be refreshed. One can so quickly overstep the mark, and important things,- the Bible, the soul, spiritual things, and remembering the Passion of the Saviour,- these things are measurably left. I am certain if God has made you a believer and you have a knowledge of the Sufferings of Christ and God gives you ability, so long as you live to the glory of God these things are compatible. I bless God for the noble souls to day who are seeking an objective for the good of the human race, but also to the glory of God. It is not just climbing the ladder and seeking fame, but to develop their talents and use them to the greater glory of God. Such persons can never achieve their objective without God. It is all done by prayer, and God will see to it that your hands are weakened so you rely on Him, so you cannot vaunt yourself.

So I will take up this point. If you see everything against the background of Gethsemane, Calvary, the cross, the grave, the skies, this will moderate, teach, humble, enrich, keep you at His feet, fill you with love to God and man. You will be in your right place then. I declare this word to the friends; keep the whole of your daily activities within the context of the Passion of Christ: this will be an unerring guide. If you want to know right and wrong you will know it in the context of the agony of Christ. If it is in conflict you are best/rid of it. This is where you find the choicest saints of God: they are in this exercise. They are not floating about with a gloss on the surface: there is deep exercise of soul concerning what is compatible with the cross of Christ.

I will take it further. You will read into the question of sleeping in the context of one another, your friends. This applies to all the sorrows and trials of the people of God who are your friends, and the concept that they are all members of one mystical Body. Say one you have dearly

loved in Christ has departed. "death is swallowed up in victory" and lost sight of. "To depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." One you dearly loved and had union and communion with in spirit has departed and the body is lying in death. After a few days there will be a solemn, sacred service and the committal of the precious dust to its quiet resting place. How is your behaviour regulated by the event? Can you say; "I have written a letter of condolence to the relatives." Is that all? Most certainly from the time of departing to the time of the interment there is incumbent on you a certain form of behaviour within the context of the death and burial of the Saviour; - the whole of your behaviour, speech, and everything in your life in the context of this. Do you see what I mean? A hush should fall over your spirit; a fasting from things that are lawful. Why? Because a sister or a brother has departed and they are to be laid to ~~at~~ rest. This applies to the afflictions and sorrows of the saints of God you are in union with. You behave in Christ in the context of what they suffer. You cannot enjoy yourself and forget about it. - I do not know whether you have heard this from the pulpit before. - There are certain things you planned to do that you cannot do because of the sufferings and afflictions of friends, or the death of friends. Am I right? I tell you one thing, if you cross the border from there you will find you have done wrong. If you cut yourself from the Body you will find in your spirit your darkness increases. You should be in fasting, watching and prayer, not feasting. These are blessed truths.

So Christ came and gave them almost a dying watchword. Assess the value and importance of it over against His death. "The good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." What is the watchword? "Watch and pray." Why? Because these are directives ~~and~~ for the people of God and preventative to falling into temptation; so you do not enter into temptation. I have mentioned before that the true interpretation of this is, that ye be not receptive of temptation. You do not enter in if you are not receptive of it. It is when you begin to yield ground and nurse the love of sin, and listen to what is so plausible you are receptive of it. You well know the devil has catered for the human race. In towns, cities and villages the devil has catered for the depraved appetite of men. You see, and hear, and if you

cast your eye in a wrong direction you become more susceptible. "Backslide" is self-explanatory. It is easy on ice; you go downhill backwards. It is very easy. So lend not your senses, your brain to all the devices of Satan of you are ready for Satan, and there is an advanced stage of inviting him. Your wicked heart invites him. To use a Biblical expression, you escape by the skin of your teeth. It may be to you as if the flames of the pit leap in front of you.

So the word is with you; watch and pray. It is impossible for me to deal with this adequately in one service. Watchfulness is enjoined on us from three facets. It means to be alert, awake, skilled. Why watch? Because, and this is the first facet; because of the many dangers and snares that menace you. Why watch? To escape danger, trouble? Not just that. You asked yourselves before divine service; this question of watching is not just to avoid dangers; it is because of the principle of holiness that seeks the honour and glory of God. It is because I know the value of my soul and I do not want to defile it.

I will name the three facets. First, watchfulness; and this covers every strata of the human race. Physicians, surgeons, nurses watch. You have the night watch. The Jews adopted the four watches of the night:— evening, midnight, cock crowing, and morning.— 6-9: 9-12: 12-3: 3-6. four watches of the night. Sailors watch: there are officers of the watch. In almost every aspect of life there is watching. You have a home and you watch over your dear children. In a certain sense your eyelids scarcely ever sleep as you watch. A pastor sent of God watches; godly deacons watch: all through the Church of God there is this watching.

So first, to watch against. You watch so you may be alerted concerning all dangers and avoid them. Second, to watch over as a sentinel. There is treasure. You will be like a sentinel watching over the Scriptures, so that there is no intrusion of error. You watch over the treasures in your heart. Third, to watch for the Lord; for His Coming; for the fulfilment of His promises; and you will watch for your prayers to be answered, and for the Saviour's coming to you, and for His second Advent. And how do you watch? With your loins girt, and your lamps burning, so

when the Bridegroom cometh you may open to Him immediately. "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.