

VIGILANCE AND CHARITY

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My Father's House

The whole gospel calls us to stay watchful and awake. We are in a spiritual warfare against an enemy who never sleeps. Jesus tells us to watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day our Lord is coming. For the Christian who remains awake, the last day will not come like a thief within the night (1 Thess 5:2). There will be no panic and no confusion because each day will be an encounter with the living Christ.

St. Paul compares this watchfulness to the guard duty of the well-armed soldier who will not allow himself to be taken by surprise (cf 1 Thess 5:4-11) (Cf *The Christian In the Military Terminology of St. Paul*, by Jay Precedo.) The Christian lives frugally and is not easily surprised by the enemy because he is awake through prayer and mortification.

Our Lord warns us in many ways, in different parables, against negligence, carelessness and half-hearted love. A loving heart is a vigilant heart, both over itself and over others, because God also expects us to be watchful and on guard over those who are especially united to us by the bonds of faith, of blood and of friendship.

Look For Him

When Our Lord speaks about the coming of the thief in the night, He is teaching us not to allow ourselves to be distracted from the great enterprise of our salvation. He doesn't want us to think of vigilance merely as something negative - to watch doesn't mean just to stay awake for fear of what might happen if we fell asleep. To watch means being alert, on the qui vive; it means craning your neck out of the window in the hope that you will be the first to cry out, 'Look! He's coming!'

Evangelization

To watch means to be looking forward with eager expectation to Our Lord's coming. It means striving with all our strength to bring to Jesus all the people entrusted to our care, and many others besides. Thanks to the Communion of Saints we are like the sentry who raises the alarm when he spots the enemy, or the lookout who waits expectantly for his Master's arrival in order to announce the good news to all.

Each Of Us Has A Ministry

Our model is that prudent servant who has been placed in charge of his Master's estate and who, while awaiting his return, spends his time doing a hundred little jobs against time; always a room to be dusted here, a floor to be polished there, a fire to be made up in this room or that, so that the house shall look a hundred per cent welcoming when he steps inside. *Each of us has got a job to do*; each of us should be inspired to do it better, especially if it looks as if we hadn't got much time to do it in.

Particular Examen

To watch, to be alert, we must overcome sleepiness and lukewarmness. We do this by struggling to put into practice the things we hear in spiritual direction, by having a clearly-defined particular examination, and by being diligent in our daily general examination.

The Day On Guard

The early Christians fulfilled Our Lord's new commandment so well that the pagans were able to recognize them by the love they had for one another, and by their universally courteous behavior. Their charity was expressed in their concern for one another's needs and, in times of difficulty, by helping all their brothers and sisters to remain steadfast in the faith. There existed among them the custom which Tertullian called the *statio*, a military term meaning 'being on guard', of fasting and doing penance twice a week with the aim of preparing to receive the Blessed Eucharist with greater purity of soul and of praying for those who were in even greater danger or need. We know, for example, that Saint Fructuosus was fasting on the day he suffered martyrdom because it was his *statio*, his 'day on guard'. Other early Christian documents give us more information about these matters.

Our Lord expects us to practice charity in a special way with those to whom we are united by the bonds of our common faith: "See how they love one another and are ready to die for one another" say the pagans ... As regards the term 'brethren' whereby we address one another, they form a mistaken idea ... by the law of nature, our common mother, they too are our brethren."

If we suffer because of mankind's neediness, how are we not going to have a vigilant charity towards those who share our own ideals! It can also be of help to us, as it was to the first Christians, to have a fixed day of the week on which to be even more attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the faith, helping them with even more fervent prayer, with an even greater spirit of penance, with more signs of esteem than ever, and with a kindlier fraternal correction. It means being especially vigilant in our charity towards the people for whom we have a greater obligation in duty, like the sentry who guards the camp, like the alert lookout watching for the enemy's approach.

What To Do On the Day On Guard

Like the early Christians, we too can have a day every week when we are particularly mindful of the needs of others. We all need one another, we can all help one another. In fact, we are continually benefiting from all the spiritual goods of the Church, from all the prayer, all the sacrifices, all that work well done and offered to God, all the suffering of sick people everywhere. At this very moment, someone, somewhere is praying for us, and our soul is revitalized by the generosity of people whom perhaps we do not know, or of someone unsuspected, very close beside us.

Everything we do has repercussions and makes an unguessed-at impact on the lives of others. This consideration ought to move us to fulfill our duties faithfully, offering our work to God, the motive praying with devotion, knowing that our work, our sickness and our prayers, closely united to the prayer and the Sacrifice of Christ renewed daily on the altar, constitute a powerful support for all.

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| 1. Daily Prayer | 8. Daily Forgiveness |
| 2. Daily Mass | 9. Daily Love |
| 3. Daily Consecration | 10. Daily Be Generous |
| 4. Daily Rosary | Weekly Confession |
| 5. Daily Practice | Monthly Spiritual Direction |
| Prudence | Justice |
| Temperance | Fortitude |