

HOMILY

The Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

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If you were diagnosed today with a terminal illness and were told that you had six months to live, how would that knowledge affect you? Some of you gathered here today may already carry that knowledge with you. What difference has it made in your life? When Sister Thea Bowman learned that she was in the fourth stage of bone cancer, she was devastated. Once a vibrant, lively, spirited nun who mesmerized people by her song and charisma, when told the news she went into a deep depression. She didn't know whether she should pray, Lord, please let me live, or Lord, please let me die. She couldn't sing a song. But one morning, as the dawn's light filled her room, a new song filled her soul:

*“Lord, I know I am going to die,
but please, Lord, let me live till I die.”*

As another liturgical year comes to a close, the Church's liturgy for the next four weeks raises thoughts about the end. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds us that no one knows the specific time or moment when this world or his or her own life on this earth will end. But be sure of this, it is coming—someday, somehow—not just to someone, but to everyone.

As believers, we are aware that the end-time will indeed come. The fact that the end has been so long in coming may cause some to be lulled into an attitude of passivity. Some may even be tempted to resort to procrastination, putting off until tomorrow or next week or next year or retirement what should be done today in order to be fully prepared to recognize and receive the Lord. As we focus on the last things, perhaps it would be helpful to engage in a little “what ifs?”

What if it were possible to know the exact time
and place of the end?

What if it were somehow possible to know the
precise time and place of our own personal
ending, our own death?

We believe that with death comes the ultimate encounter with the Risen Jesus. Part of that encounter will be a reckoning during which each of us will be held accountable for what we have done or not done during life with the gifts and the blessings entrusted to us. If such information were available, what impact would it have on your present existence? If you knew without a doubt that you had exactly two weeks to live before crossing to death's other side, what would you do?

- ✦ Would you take the vacation you have been promising your family for years?
- ✦ Would you make the rounds of family and friends for one last visit?
- ✦ Would you make amends with a friend, brother, sister, or parent with whom you have been estranged?
- ✦ Would you make more of an effort at daily prayer?
- ✦ Would you seek out the guidance of a priest for reconciliation?
- ✦ Would you make a much needed donation to a needy charity?
- ✦ Would you look differently at the faces sitting around your table tonight?
- ✦ Would flowers smell sweeter? Would the sun feel warmer? Would the sky look bluer?

In other words, would you make radical changes in the way you are thinking and living; or would the knowledge of imminent death simply mean that you would go on living as you have been until the moment arrives?

To help us in this the Church puts before us today four models, namely: the woman in the First Reading from Proverbs and the three servants in the Matthean gospel parable. If called to give an account of herself, it would appear that the woman of worth had indeed developed her talents and made the most of her blessing. The quality of her day-to-day existence was such that those with whom she lived (her husband and family) and those with whom she came into contact (the poor, the needy, etc.) benefited.

Two of the servants in the gospel also did their best with the time and opportunities allotted to them. Each used his abilities in such a way as to be able to render an admirable account of his daily activities. But the third servant allowed both

opportunity and talents to lie fallow. As a result of his cowardice and procrastination, he was reckoned as worthless, lazy and undeserving of any share in his master's joy.

Today, these four models remind believers (in both a positive and negative sense) of the importance of living each day to the fullest, developing and using our abilities in complete correspondence with the daily gift of grace, so as to be prepared for the inevitable but unpredictable day of the Lord.

