

+A missionary in Africa was translating the gospel into a local dialect. When the missionary couldn't find a word to translate "to believe," he asked a native African how to translate it. The native thought a moment and said, "I think to believe should be translated, to hear with the heart."

Hearing with our heart means responding with our heart too. Faith is a noun, but it's also a verb calling us, as Jesus says in today's gospel, to be dressed for action and our lamps lit.

In our modern-day images, dressed for action and our lamps lit might make us think of first responders, fire fighters, or perhaps a search and rescue team prepared and ready to go into action.

Or, it might also remind us of a mother of a sick child. The mother is half asleep in the dark but instantly hears and responds to the cry of her child. She is alert and ready for action, because she hears her child's cry with her heart.

In today's parable, Jesus' image is one of attitude as we await his return. Jesus expects us to be so alert in faith that we can see what is expected of us and once we see what Jesus wants, we will act.

So, to be a follower of Jesus is to be one who is ready to put our faith into action, even if the need to serve arises inconveniently, at midnight or at dawn. "Be on guard. The Son of Man will come when you least expect him." This is not so complicated, for Jesus comes to us in the simple needs of people.

+An older woman was going through some difficult times, and she began to doubt God's existence. This both puzzled and troubled her, because it had never happened before. She went to her priest for help. She expected some convincing arguments that would prove beyond all doubt that God was alive and well, but to her surprise, the priest didn't do that.

His advice was very simple and at the time, didn't make much sense to her. He told her to go and do specific acts of love and kindness for the people in her life, and everything would be just fine, not to fear. She followed his advice and in time, all her doubts about God completely disappeared.

She found God alive in the people she reached out to in love. She discovered that faith is a verb and when she did, her faith came alive in her newfound service of love. For the first time in her life, she heard the gospel message of love with her heart. As Mother Teresa put it, "We can do no great things; only small things with great love."

+According to an old fable, a man made an unusual agreement with Death. He told the Grim Reaper that he would willingly accompany him when it came time to die, but only on one condition – that Death would send a messenger well in advance to warn him. The years passed by and then one bitter winter evening Death suddenly entered the room and tapped him on the shoulder.

Startled, the man cried out, "You're here without warning! I thought we had an agreement." Death replied, "I've more than kept my part. I've sent you many messengers. Look in the mirror and you'll see some of them." As the man complied, Death whispered, "Notice your hair!"

Once it was full and golden, now it is thin and white. Look at the way you tilt your head to listen to me because you can't hear very well. Observe how close to the mirror you must stand to see yourself clearly. Yes, I've sent many messengers through the years. I'm sorry you're not ready, but the time has come for you to leave."

There always seems some obsession by some concerning the end of the world, but I don't think we need to get worked up about this, because we will all experience the coming of Christ at the moment of our death. The truth is that none of us knows when the Lord will come to us. It can be anywhere and anytime.

+There is a striking reflection on the Lord's coming to each of us that was written years ago by Blessed James Alberione. It speaks very dramatically about the particular judgment that takes place at the moment of our death.

He writes, "In whatever place we die, there shall the judgment-seat be erected, and we shall face it alone, accompanied only by our deeds, good or bad. Christ has no need of witnesses, neither of the devil's accusations nor of the saints' defense of us.

He knows all things; He is the all-wise Judge. He sees our minds and the thoughts entertained there. Christ knows every sentiment of our heart, from the lowest to the holiest. He knows how many letters have flowed from our pen and how much labor we have accomplished.

He knows every step we have taken, the studies we have pursued, our relationships and correspondence, our daily routine of home life.... Furthermore, the Lord knows how much we should have been done.... He knows the degree of health a person had, the degree of intelligence, keenness of mind, memory and ability; the graces given in childhood, youth and adulthood....

Christ knows every word uttered, from the first moment of our use of reason down to the last time our lips formed a word. Every word is written in the book of life — empty words, holy words, forgotten words....

If the judgment were to take place now, could we say that we have, for the most part, been faithful to God? The best way of preparing for the Lord's return is not by trying to "get in under the wire" by doing some great thing just in time but simply by being faithful and to listen with our hearts...to do small things with great love.

We may or may not be here when the Lord appears in glory at the Second Coming. But we will all encounter the Lord when he surely comes to each of us when our earthly life is over. What will that moment be like? Will it be a moment of regret or joy? Will we fear a Judge or welcome a Friend? That is up to us. I am hoping for a high five, just not now...