

Be Prepared. That is the motto of the Boy Scouts of America. And it's a good motto. Especially for someone who has absolutely no natural, innate skill at being a Boy Scout, like me. I didn't get much from my days of scouting, but I do remember that motto. Be prepared.

Be prepared is the reason I brought a pad lock to summer camp for my footlocker, not for the other boys, but to keep the raccoons out. Be prepared is the reason I packed wool socks for our winter campout, and successfully kept my feet from becoming frozen pork chops.

Be prepared is the reason I slept in my clothes the night before a major thunderstorm. And subsequently was the only member of my troop who did not streak through camp in his underwear when the tornado siren sounded. Be prepared kept me out of a lot of problems and away from a lot of danger.

But be prepared was also a lot of work. It was a lot of work researching every facet of the trip we were going on. It was a lot of work considering every feasible problem I might encounter. And it was a lot of work hauling the inevitable extra baggage to the camp site, especially when my less well prepared friends had brought much less.

At the end of our Gospel lesson today, Jesus gives us the same message: "Be prepared." And like my preparation for camping, it can seem like an awful lot of baggage to carry.

Because, according to Jesus, being prepared means always being dressed for service, with lamps lit, waiting until the wee hours of the morning. Watching for the master to return. Being prepared means guarding your house day and night. Expecting that at any moment, a thief might arrive and steal away everything important to you. Being prepared is a lot of work.

Be prepared is a great motto to live by. But it's also a tremendous weight to carry. And all the moreso because we are not simply preparing for a camping trip. We are preparing for everything. For the rest of our lives. For the end of our lives. And for the eternity that is to come.

And that can sound like an immense burden to us. To be ready at every moment of your life. Both physically and spiritually. To guard against every possible threat to both your body and soul. It's absolutely overwhelming.

I think about those members of the church down in Fort Worth, TX who were killed recently. They thought they were prepared. They had a security team at their church. Armed members of the congregation, trained by a retired FBI agent. And, to be fair, that security may have saved a lot of lives. But two innocent people still died, plus the shooter himself.

They were at church, in the middle of communion, of things. They were in the safest place they could possibly be, or so they thought. How can you possibly be prepared for that?

The same thing can weigh on our minds as we approach this new year. Because the world is full of dangers. Full of threats. Full of risks. More than we can possibly be prepared for.

And, frankly, it's full of temptations. Full of doubts. Full of frustrations. Full of sins. How can we possibly be physically and, more importantly, spiritually prepared for everything 2020 might bring us? When you really think about, being prepared in God's eyes is a full-time job and a huge burden to carry with you.

And yet, we can't look at this passage alone, in isolation to Jesus' larger message. Just a few verses prior to this, Jesus has something very different to say. He says:

*“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing... Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

Our salvation is not so fragile that we need be overwhelmed with worry about it. It is a purse that will not wear out. A treasure that will not run out. It cannot be taken from us by anything in this world, either accidentally or intentionally.

Not by mad gunmen or the threats of this life. Not by temptations, doubts, or fears. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Just as Jesus assures us that we need not worry about the food that we will eat in this life or the water we will drink or clothes that we will wear because he will provide all these things, so also he promises to provide us food, drink, and clothing for the soul.

He provides his own Body, broken as bread for our nourishment. His own Blood, poured out as wine for our refreshment. His very death and resurrection washing over us in water that we might be clothed with his righteousness.

Don't worry about your life, what tomorrow will bring, what you will eat or what you will wear. Whether tomorrow brings more of this life or the beginning of the next, your Father in heaven has already provided for you.

Therefore, as Jesus says, be ready. But not ready as if with a burden or with dread. Be ready for the master to come... and serve you. That's what Jesus tells us. The master serves his servants. He heals their sick. He forgives their sins. He washes their feet. He dies in their place. The master calls us to be ready, but then it is he who makes a place ready for you.

Jesus calls upon his disciples to be prepared not in order to burden us, but in order to bless us. He wants us to live this life such that we are not consumed by worry for the things of this world. We are not worried about our lives. We are not worried about our fragile faith.

Rather, we live in preparation for what is to come. We live in preparation for something better than waiting. Better than temptation. Better than sin and doubt and fear. We live in preparation for his return. For the paradise he is preparing for us.

No, the only burden of preparation we've been given is the burden to share this news with all the world. Peter tells us in his first epistle, *“always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”*

We don't live in fear or worry. We live in hope. A hope that others see and are curious about. To be prepared for Christ's return is to be prepared to give an answer to those who wonder about this hope that is in us. A hope that defies all dangers this world can throw at us.

So, I encourage you, make 2020 a year of preparation. A year when you stay dressed for action, with your lamps burning. A year when, at every moment, you expect your master's return. Not because you are filled with anxiety about what would happen if you don't.

But because it is a joyful and blessed thing to hope for. Because you are eager and excited to soon be served by him, not under this veil of tears, but in the glory of paradise. Make 2020 a year of preparation, because our Lord is coming soon. And we have joined St John in praying, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” Amen.