

December 31, 2021 – Romans 8:31b-39 & Luke 12:35-40

As some of you may know, my daughter loves nutcrackers. She loves the Nutcracker ballet, but she also loves the little wooden nutcrackers that you see decorating homes this time of year. And so, knowing that she loves nutcrackers, my mom got her a nutcracker Christmas ornament.

But it was kind of an unusual ornament, because it wasn't a traditional nutcracker. No, it was a nutcracker dressed like Father Time. As an old man dressed in robes with a long white beard and long white hair, a large scythe in one hand, an hourglass in the other, with a sash identifying the year hanging from his shoulder. You've probably seen depictions of Father Time before.

Emi had not. She was completely unfamiliar with the image. So we had to explain to her what it meant. That on New Years day, the year is like a newborn baby. And that every day that baby gets old and older. That year gets older and older. Until finally, on New Year's Eve, the year has become an old man, ready to die so that a new year can be born.

It's an interesting metaphor, isn't it. This idea of each year being a microcosm of our own lives. We start every year like a newborn, full of life and energy. We end every year like an old man, wiser for what we've learned, but also weary and frail. With the hope, of course, that we can start fresh next year.

And that's where the metaphor starts to fall apart. The year may be reborn every January 1st. But we are not. We have one life, with a beginning and an end. We're born, we live, we grow old, and we die. Father Time gives us hope for a new year, but also a reminder that we can't go back. We need to make the most of each day.

Our gradual for this evening comes from Psalm 90:12. *"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."* There is wisdom that comes from taking stock of things. Assessing your life. Counting the number of days you have already lived. And counting the days you have yet to live. Because you can't go back.

Each day is a gift that God has given us. Each day we are alive is a blessing from the Lord. That he has chosen to give each one of us, individually. God did not put you on this earth and then forget that he had made you. You're not sitting here right now because of an accident or chance or an oversight.

You are here because God has counted your days. And by his count, you have more days to live. And you will continue to have more days until God finally does say, "That's it. That's all of your days."

Which leaves us with a pretty important question: how have we used those days? Because that's really where the wisdom of counting our days comes from. There's wisdom in knowing the gift of life God has given you. There's even greater wisdom in using the gift of life that God has given you. How have you used this gift?

It's a deep question. It's a difficult question. Maybe the most difficult question that a person can ask themselves. Have I used each day to the fullest? Have I used each day as God intended it? God gave me these days as a gift, after all. I imagine he'd like them used in a particular way.

But how exactly? How does God want our days used? That's a question that's deceptively difficult to answer. Because, on the one hand, we can say that God has laid out exactly how he wants our days used in his Law. In the Ten Commandments.

You shall have no other gods. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy. Honor your father and mother. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. Or anything else that is your neighbors. That's how God wants us to spend our days.

In some ways, it's very instructive. And in other ways, it's not very helpful at all. For one thing, because God's Law was never intended to spell out the exact details of every single day of our lives. And, for another, because even if it did, we couldn't do it.

So much of our lives is spent breaking God's Law. So many of our days are spent doing the exact opposite of what God intends for them. So much of our time is used wasting the gifts that God has given us. With the way that we misuse the days we are given, it's a wonder God let's us wake up each morning at all. But that was, indeed, the gift given to us through Jesus Christ.

As St Paul reminds us in our Epistle, every day that we waste, is a day that Jesus spends interceding for us at the Father's right hand. Every day that God counts against us and condemns us to death, is a day that Jesus spends pointing to his own death on the cross and his own resurrection from the dead, so that we might have life. Life in this life and life in the next. Which is really where we get the answer to all of this.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus gives us a parable. A parable that we hear in various forms throughout the gospels. Sometimes it's stewards who are given gold talents to invest. Sometimes it's virgins with lamps waiting for the bridegroom to arrive. Tonight, it's simply servants waiting for their master to come home.

Regardless of the illustration used, the point is always the same. These are all parables about waiting. Parables about readiness. Parables meant to remind us that this life is not all there is.

There is another life coming. A life in heaven, yes. But even more so, a life on earth. A resurrection of the dead. When Christ will return and make all things new.

It's a life given to those who are waiting and ready. Those who are awake, dressed for action, with their lamps burning. A life given to those who are counting their days to gain a heart of wisdom.

But they're not counting them down in despair toward their death. They're not counting them down hopelessly looking back in regret on all that they have failed to do. They're counting them down dreading the day that Father Time catches up with them once and for all. No, this is a life given to those who are counting down the days until their master returns.

God has given us so many days. We can use them for good. We can use them for bad. We can be proud of how we spent those days. Or we can be ashamed of how we spent those days. But, ultimately, the heart of the Gospel is this: God has given us so many days. And God will give us so many more days.

Because it is not the servants who serve the master. No, what our text says quite clearly is that it's the master who serves the servants. It is the master who is so joyful at finding his servants waiting for him, that he dresses himself for service. That he has them recline at his own table. That he comes and serves them a feast. A feast of his own Body and Blood.

How should we spend our days? We should spend them waiting. Watching. Hoping. For that day when our Lord returns. For that day when our Lord takes us home.

Paul tells us that tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword are nothing for those who are in the love of Christ Jesus. Why? Because each of these trials only brings us closer to meeting our master who loves us and died for us and serves us. We are more than conquerors of all that this life can throw at us, because in our Lord Jesus death itself is still a victory that brings us life.

The world looks at 2021 and sees it growing and dying, just as so many people this year grew old and died. Or didn't grow old, yet still died. But that's the reality of a sinful world. 2021 reminded us of that just like every year does.

But for us who are in Christ Jesus, ending 2021 means something different. Ending 2021 means we are one year closer to our Lord's return. We are one year closer to him coming home and finding us awake and dressed for action with our lamps burning. We are one year closer to putting behind us these sinful lives that waste the days God gives and this sinful world filled with death. And celebrating forever the love of God that cannot be separated from us.

We are one year closer to being truly reborn. Resurrected. Not as infants, but as the perfect, holy people of God that we were always meant to be. Father Time growing old, dying, and being reborn may be a fictitious image. But the death of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead is very real. Our baptism into his death and resurrection is very real. And our future as his saints is very real.

2022 is only a few hours away. So let us count the days, the hours, minutes, seconds. Let us count every moment until our Lord returns and Father Time is no more. For on that day, we will spend eternity with Jesus. Amen.