

“Unexpectedly?!” Matthew 24:36-44

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The new Church year has begun. The Advent season, which means that in our meditations we will focus on the coming of the Lord. On the return of the Triune God in His heavenly glory and divine majesty with all His heavenly armies.

There was something unexpected that happened in Latvia around this time of the year every year. Year after year. It was this unexpected... first snow. Yes, it always caught our city councils off guard and unprepared.

“Unexpected first snow has again paralysed the traffic in streets of our capital.” That’s how news outlets would report on what was happening. Unexpectedly! But, of course. It’s November or December. It is the beginning of winter. Every year winter has come with ... the first snow. Of course! Still... unexpected.

In our today’s reading Jesus also speaks about something unexpected. About the Day when He will return in His divine glory and grandeur. Up to this moment in Chapter 24 Jesus was telling His disciples about the signs of the end times.

Now He turns His focus to the Day of His return. **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”** That’s quite something. Surely, we will be able to see the signs, but the Day... the Last Day will come unexpectedly.

“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Fine, but how was it in the days of Noah? **“They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.”** What can we read in these few simple words that describe this most tragic time in the history of mankind?

On the one hand these words help us to see the surprising and unexpected nature of the flood and also of the coming of the Son of Man. People were doing their usual stuff. Simply going about their daily businesses.

Then suddenly... unexpectedly... a flood happened. As if there were no signs, no indications whatsoever before, that something like that could happen. The flood caught everyone unprepared, for they just didn't see it coming.

This description almost begs the question: “Why did God do this?” Was that the angry God of the Old Testament? I guess we need to look a bit closer to what Jesus is saying, we need to understand what was going on before the flood.

We can read more in Genesis 6. **“The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.”** (Gen 6:5-6)

There is something terrifying, something chilling revealed with these simple words, – **“They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.”** On their own, these are good things, nothing wrong with them.

In a way this sentence paints a rather nice and harmonious picture. People seemingly happily go about their daily lives... as if there was nothing else, nothing greater and more significant than ... to satisfy their physical needs.

But when you pair this picture together with – **“every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually”** – then we get a different picture. Not one of innocent activities anymore, but of obtuse indifference to their Creator.

Full stomachs, fat hearts, arrogant and self-centred, despising the One who provided for them everything, who kept their hearts beating, and put daily bread on their tables, who continually called them to return to the source of life, to the living God, their Creator.

Isn't this rather fitting a description of our society today's society? Where people are simply going about their daily lives, all in all rather busy trying to satisfy their bodily needs, wants, desires, and cravings.

At the same time rejecting, ignoring, sneering at, mocking the quiet and gentle voice of their Creator and Redeemer as He continually calls them to Himself. What a chilling stranglehold of spiritual indifference and complacency hidden under the disguise of these ordinary activities!

And we see it all around us. Too often. And if we are honest, we see it not only around us, but too often we can see it in us. There are so many nice people. Smiling.

Going about their lives. Friendly. Social. Active. Involved. Committed to different causes. Many may actually even self-identify as Christians.

Just one thing is missing. There is no place for God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit neither in their hearts, nor minds, nor in their lives. There is no place, no time, no need, no interest in knowing and being with the One, who gives them life and every breath and every heartbeat and everything ... every minute of every day. Just like in the days of Noah...

Unexpectedly?! How can the flood come unexpectedly? For a hundred years Noah was building the ark and proclaiming what is to happen? Year after year people saw the next and the next stage in the building of the ark being completed.

Year after year Noah would speak on behalf of God Yahweh, calling people to repentance from their evil ways, from their indifference, warning about the day that was coming. It's not that they hadn't heard, it's just that they didn't listen.

It's not that they didn't know, it's just that they couldn't care less. Why would they listen, why would they care?! Nothing like that had happened before. How could something like that happen?! It seemed impossible...

This is who we are. This is what the Church is now. We are little Noahs and the Church is the ark that will safely bring us through the coming flood of God's wrath and judgment to the promised New Creation.

This is why we are here – to invite people on board, before it is too late, before the door is closed and the flood begins. What a great responsibility it is, so we need to pray for God's help that we too have our opportunities to extend God's invitation: "Come, come onboard! There is room for everyone."

Perhaps people were friendly laughing at Noah and with a patronizing attitude saying that: "He is not a bad dude, this Noah, he is just overly religious, zealot, that's just too much. The guy has just taken that stuff too seriously. He has gone nuts because of his faith."

And it was so **"until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."** How much like that it is also today?!

Perhaps you too know people who would have the similar sentiment towards you. "My folks, my relies, my friends, these Christians, they are not bad people. We all are spiritual. They just take things too literally, too seriously, that's just too much."

The Day will come unexpectedly. But how could that be?! Today the Gospel of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed around the world. In every continent, in every country, in every language, and using every possible media.

It is proclaimed face-to-face, the Bible is printed in almost every language, the message from Jesus is on radio, on TV, online, in your mobile, it is everywhere. It is almost impossible not to hear the voice of the Triune God and Jesus Christ.

“Return to me, my people! Shake off your spiritual indifference, turn away from your evil ways! Return to me! I am waiting for you... I am still waiting for you! I want to have you with me when I bring forth the New Heavens and Earth.”

If only people had ears to listen, eyes to see, and hearts to believe. But most of them simply go on about eating and drinking, about marrying and giving in marriage. Until ... unexpectedly the Day will come.

This is why Jesus is continually reminding us. **“Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** Surely, we could say even today that, perhaps, the Son of Man is not coming just yet...

It surely doesn't look like He is coming, right? No, not today. No, not this year... probably not that soon... Are you sure? This is exactly what Jesus was telling His disciples. It will happen unexpectedly. No one knows the day... we only know that it will come. We too tend to become complacent.

Therefore, Jesus says, you must be ready! But how can we be ready? What does it mean? What should we do? There is this strange thing, whenever we hear anything from our God, any instruction, any exhortation, our fallen nature immediately perceives it as something negative, restrictive, imposing on us.

It is surprising how our old nature, and that is true of us as much as for everyone else, how it twists our thinking. But this "being ready" is the very opposite. Take a minute and reflect on our lives.

Sure, we are quite fond of this place, of this planet, it's beautiful, and there are people, some of them are so close to our hearts, dearer than our own lives. There is love, and friendships, and comradeship and adventures, there are goals to achieve and missions to accomplish, there are so many joyful responsibilities and experiences.

But the longer we travel through this life, the clearer it becomes how temporary everything is. As Solomon said, at the end of day, all of this is vanity, like a breath on a cold morning, here it is and the next moment it is gone. None of the best things in our lives last, sooner or later they all end. Many of them sooner...

How to be ready? See, we are not waiting as doomed for something good to end with the coming of Christ, it is the very opposite, we are waiting for something great, something intriguing and magnificent to come.

Can you remember a situation when you were waiting to meet someone you love with all your heart? The hour was coming when you were to see them again, when you were able to embrace them again. Remember how excited you were?

Looking forward to that moment... Can you multiply that feeling by 10, by 100, by 1000? For that is how your Lord and brother Jesus Christ is waiting for you; ready to welcome you, ready to embrace you, to show you around and to introduce you.

Have you ever been waiting to move into your new apartment, or a house, into your new place? Counting days when that will happen, waiting with eager expectations, impatient to finally have a home? This is what we are waiting for, our eternal home.

Have you been waiting for a loved one to arrive and have tried to prepare for them a place, cleaning, arranging, thinking how to surprise them, how to please them, how to make them happy? Can you multiply that by 10, by 100, by 1000?

This is how Jesus is waiting for you to show you your new home, which he has gone to prepare for you, and He cannot wait for you to see what He has prepared. Even we put in our hearts trying to surprise our loved one as much as we can.

The thing is that Jesus is not as limited as we are. Whatever you may imagine, the reality will be much more beautiful. Take it from the one who was taken there, from Paul the apostle: **“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, God has prepared for those who love him.”** (1 Cor 2:9) For you.

I think this is easy enough to remember, how to be ready for the day that is coming. Let's pray that we may be like little Noahs, inviting everyone onboard. Let's pray that the good Lord straightens our hearts that His return would be for us the most hoped for, the most dreamed about, the most expected event.

The day when all our hopes and all our dreams and all our longings are fulfilled by no one else, but by our Lord and our God Jesus Christ.

Just as He promised, and just as we expected.

Blessed this Advent season!

Amen.