

**Homily for Knights of Columbus Hall of Fame Mass and Banquet
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
October 29, 2016**

**St. Paul Church
Highland, IL**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, three months ago, there was an article written in the Chicago Sun-Times that examined one of the possible scenarios for the World Series. The author speculated about what it would mean if the two teams with the longest World Series victory drought, the Chicago Cubs and the Cleveland Indians, were to play against one another. The author concluded his thoughts with the following words:

There are no givens in baseball because it's too funky a sport. And we'd be crazy to suggest that two teams that haven't won a World Series in a combined 174 years are on a collision course. But if it happens that these two parched organizations meet in the World Series, can you imagine the end-of-world implications? Or does a tied Game 7 just keep going and going, like pi?¹

As you know, these two teams are indeed playing in this year's World Series, causing some people, jokingly of course, to wonder if we are living

in the end times. Throw into the mix the unprecedented presidential election that is about to take place in our country, and some may actually be considering if these are all signs that the return of the Lord is near.

I wish to be clear that my bringing these things up is not my prediction that the world is going to end soon. My purpose is to bring to your attention how easy it can be for people to try to interpret the signs of the times, thus concluding that they signal that the end is upon us. Such predictions have been happening since the time that Jesus ascended into Heaven nearly two thousand years ago.

In our second reading, we hear St. Paul addressing the Church in Thessalonica whose members had been shaken by one such prediction, thinking that the return of the Lord was imminent. The Lord Himself made it quite clear that the time of His return would not be known, as He said in Matthew's Gospel: "of that day and hour no one knows" (Matthew 24:36).

For nearly two millennia, this definitive moment of the Lord's return has been delayed. The result of this is that people, consciously or unconsciously, have decided that the end of time is still a long way off. Jesus knew this attitude would be present, so He made sure to remind His

listeners that we must always be prepared, “for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Matthew 24:44).

There is an old saying from philosophy that says that “virtue is found in the middle,” and that certainly applies as we consider the attitude that we need to have toward the return of the Lord. We certainly do not want to be so complacent that the thought never crosses our mind, leaving us unprepared. At the same time, we do not want to be so anxious about the uncertainty of His coming that we become virtually paralyzed, unable to do anything because of our fear of the unknown.

The question then is how best to ensure that we are prepared for that unknown hour? We can look to the Gospel for today’s Mass for some help in arriving at an answer. The story that we heard is that of the tax collector Zacchaeus. He was a public sinner, as indicated by those in the crowd who grumbled when Jesus went to the house of Zacchaeus. After encountering Jesus, Zacchaeus underwent a conversion, as demonstrated by his words: “But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over” (Luke 19:8).

Zacchaeus put his life in order and began to live a good life. His example reminds us that the first thing we need to do to ensure that we are prepared for the return of the Lord is to have our life in order. If we are aware of anything in our life that has separated us from Christ and His Church, we need to address it. Jesus told Zacchaeus to “come down quickly” (Luke 19:5), a detail which we can interpret to mean the urgency with which we must humble ourselves and present our sins to the loving and merciful Savior in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Once we experience this life-changing grace, we are then able to live fully a life according to the Gospel, which is the sure and certain path that will ensure that we are prepared for the coming of the Lord. Constantly being in the state of grace gives us the confidence to know that when we do reach that final moment, we will be given the strength to remain faithful to the end, because without that gift of sanctifying grace in our souls, we cannot hope to be saved.

It is unfortunate that, in recent decades, the Church’s teaching about the necessity of being in the state of grace for salvation has not been promoted as much. Some believe such language to be too rigid or

incompatible with a more loving and merciful view of Jesus that has come to prominence. But this is simply not true.

If we look at the first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we can see this teaching with greater clarity. God is described as a “lover of souls” (Wisdom 11:26) who warns us from time to time of our sins so that we are not parted from Him. It is a powerful sign of His love and mercy that He calls us to conversion because He desires for us to be saved. But He will not force us to accept this gift of salvation, so we need to be willing to make the changes that are necessary.

The Church, which we often refer to as our Holy Mother, has this same desire for souls to be saved. As our Mother, she wants what is best for us and is willing to say things that may make us feel a little uncomfortable at times, but it is always, I repeat, always at the service of our salvation. During this Year of Mercy, we have been encouraged by the Church, our loving mother, to re-encounter the power of God’s mercy personally, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As with Zacchaeus, once we experience mercy personally, we become able to live it authentically in our relationships with others. In this regard, Jesus reminds us that this is the other necessary part of being prepared to

meet the Lord when He comes, that we live the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, providing for the needs of those whom we encounter on our pilgrimage of faith as we await the Lord's return.²

Later this evening, the Knights of Columbus will be honoring some members from throughout the diocese by inducting them into their Hall of Fame for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. These men stand out as examples of what it looks like to live this life of preparation for the coming of the Lord. Their love of Jesus Christ and His Church has moved them to share their time and energy to support the many good works of mercy undertaken by the Knights, works which are very much at the heart of the Gospel way of life. While their deeds have been noticed by others, they recognize that the glory belongs to God, and the true recognition for which they long is to be counted among the members of the Church's Hall of Fame in Heaven, the Communion of Saints.

As we continue our celebration of this Eucharist, let us ask the Lord for the graces that we need in order to remain close to the Lord, never drifting away from Him. By doing this, we will always be prepared for that unknown day and hour when He will return. May the love and mercy that He shares in this sacred gift urge us to share our gifts with others as

we wait so that when the Lord does return, He will find us doing good and will say those words which we all long to hear on that day: “Well done, my good and faithful servant ... Come, share your master’s joy” (Matthew 25:21).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Morrissey, Rick. "Do the End Times Involve the Cubs, Indians in the World Series?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 31, 2016. Accessed October/November, 2016. <http://chicago.suntimes.com/sports/do-the-end-times-involve-the-cubs-indians-in-the-world-series/>.

² cf. Matthew 25:31-46.