

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 1st Sunday Advent Year A1

Scripture readings seem sometime to assume we know exactly what is being referred to by just the fact that it is brought up, and we might, but we might not either? I feel that way about today's reading with the phrase in the gospel. **"For as it was in the days of Noah"** (Matt 24:37). Okay, just 'how was it in the days of Noah-tell me about it.' I am aware of the Noah story, but what detail should I be thinking about in reference to Jesus' time too, or what should I take from it, and, do today, or act on this day because of the story.

What are we to take from that statement? **'As it was in the days of Noah'** What about it? I don't know? Is Jesus saying, "Times now are just as bad, but they are about to change"? Or is He saying, "Build a lifeboat, run to the highest hills and hide, or take to the air somehow and stay there?" Or none of those things. Hmmm? Whatever specifically happened with the ark and flood -we do not have to get bogged down into the intriguing questions (and there are many of them -- it always blows my mind thinking that everyone else was so unconcerned about what Noah was up to—I ask, "Just how long did such a project take Noah, and what (talk about modern marvels) kind of mechanical devices were given to Noah for such an engineering feat – imagine that the newly developed tools/technology/machines developed to accomplish it, might have been as equal a grace for his family's continued survival after the flood, than the ark building itself? Surely neighbors scratched their heads in amazement, asking, "What are you building up on the bluff" or the timber harvesters ask, "So, what is all this lumber going into?" And if the ark building project alone wasn't enough, how about them questioning Noah's attempt to corner the 'animal market' by gathering up two of every specimen? Didn't that all raise flags of alarm for them?

Well, I find Jesus' point with this phrase, **(As it was in the days of Noah)** to be His way of sharpening up our ***'surprise' skills***? We need to be better on guard and reduce the surprise element in life's end. Apparently with Noah 99.9 % of the world was caught off guard. The Genesis reading leads us to believe that only 8 people escape - Noah & Wife (*curiously she's been*

*assigned three different names over time, Jewish scholars called her Naamah, others called her Bat-enosh, and early Christians as Emzara (if you have ever seen the Ark Encounter Museum in Williamstown Ky, 45 miles South of Cincinnati-you know a restaurant there named after her), but only Noah his wife, & sons Shem, Japheth, Ham & their wives make a total of 8 aboard saved. (Several years ago my nephew told me a bunch of Noah jokes, asking, "Why did Noah never take his sons fishing?" I figured did he not want to spoil them fishing in a barrel or that he was through being around water?" but he told me, "No! Noah had three sons, but only **two** worms!" or where did Noah put the bees on board--in the Ark Hives!) But not to quibble over numbers, for sure, those surviving the flood were very few. So Jesus is highlighting the need for us to not miss out, but be awake & vigilant about the end. We are likely **not going to see its coming** – so simply be ready all the time. Jesus is saying, "Live as I am showing you to, and be ready now, for the last day is every day." *There are no workarounds the end for us.**

Which is where Jesus' next lines come in to play, about some men being out working in a field and then some women in the kitchen grinding grain. This is Jesus' way of saying, 'Don't get caught up-- tricked into thinking **some special location** will save you, or some specific 'prepping' will rescue you, like buying a special gadget such as a survival straw or iodine tablets (*that's the purpose of the 'one taken & one left' talk*). Some people might have thought 'Oh I will be safe sheltering **out in the field**' (like the frequent mantra, 'run to the hills') or 'I'll escape sheltering **in the grain cellar or fortified silo**. No, even there in our hideaways, 'one will be taken and one left'. So, Jesus is saying that being prepared for the END, is not a matter of physical prepping and running here or there, but it is a matter of 'spiritual prepping'. Anything that needs doing, do it now. Anything needs changing, get at it now. Being saved at the end, requires a **spiritual readiness** from us

So commonly, a mistake is made handling such 'end of days' talk from Jesus, because His intent is not to whip us up into fear as some of my preacher friends do. Such 'fear farming' that some people engage in is not fruitful for us as followers of Jesus. Jesus tells us 'Stay Awake-Be prepared'. Or what is Homeland Security's motto, "Be Prepared, not Scared"? Because panic, like fear, causes us to accelerate our destruction – like drinking sea

water stranded on buoy in the Atlantic, or that scary Geico commercial where the teenagers are running from the serial killer and one kid suggests, *"Let's hide behind the chainsaws in the workshop."* I heard a private security team-leader, one time say, *"Your worry will only make things worse- Leave that to me, I get paid to worry."* I understood him to mean that his job was to imagine how things may go wrong, identify/mitigate all risks, or how we targets advertise their weaknesses. He was saying, "Your overactive worry escalates your danger." We need to be focused on Jesus alone, already doing what He commanded and trusting our spiritual training (not get caught up in the frenzy of 'railing about the rapture'). Are you genuinely loving God and loving neighbor, then you are on right path of preparedness? The last thing we need is to ramp up anxiety and worry over the end's coming. If we simply meet worry/anxiety head on with alertness, it will dissipate as quickly as it developed.

So, Jesus calls for our 'spiritual vigilance' in the gospel today. And Advent as a 4 week countdown season to Christmas, helps us to exercise 'alertness drills' by calling us to better daily prayer, stronger commitment to weekly mass, or trying new daily practices such as prayer devotions, spirituality studies, coming to weekday mass or volunteering in some new service projects or charity. These daily practices can create in us a more ready awareness of God working in the world around us. Jesus calls for our better attentiveness, diligence and circumspection about His movements in our lives every day. Watch and stay awake, Jesus says, any day may be our last!