

Sermon for the Second Vespers of Lent

"He who keeps you will not slumber". (Psa 121:3)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Throughout this season of Lent, our eyes are serving as a metaphor for the sin that dwells within us – our betraying eyes, slanderous eyes, proud eyes and arrogant eyes, brutal eyes, heartless eyes, unappeasable eyes... The list is long according to St.

Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tim 3:1-5), but tonight we will consider our "Sleepy Eyes," that we may awaken from the slumber of sin to fix our eyes on Jesus and the new life to which He is calling us.

According to our readings tonight, it sounds like we do NOT want to be caught sleeping when our Lord comes back to us. Jesus said, "Be on guard, keep awake" lest the Master come suddenly and find you asleep" (Mark 13:33, 36). Apparently, this would be bad...

It reminds me of my days on a very demanding surgical service in the hospital where I did my medical training. The Chairman of the department had written the Textbook of Surgery used around the world, and had also performed the world's first heart transplant. So of course I thought, "Hey, wouldn't it be cool to be able to say one day that I had assisted in surgery with the man who performed the world's first heart transplant."

Let's just file that under the category of, "be careful what you wish for," because I did indeed get a spot on that service and ended up enduring 6 weeks of sleepless, exhausting, unrelenting punishment for my trouble. True, I did learn a lot... And one of the things I learned was how to stay awake on attending rounds. Because no matter how many days it had been since you last slept, you were NOT to fall asleep on attending rounds. "Be on

guard, keep awake, lest the attending come and find you asleep!”

Well, not only is this easier said than done, but in my case on one particular occasion, it was impossible. It happened one morning when the attending decided to wrap up rounds with a lecture at a table down in the cafeteria. It was a set-up for failure, a genuine “sheep-and-goat-separating moment.” I did the best I could. Not only that, but as I began to fade, a neurosurgical resident sitting next to me tried to save me. He leaned over and whispered urgently (and I paraphrase slightly), “Reach down, grab your “sensitive parts,” and crush ‘em! It’ll wake you up.” So I did... and it did... for a brief moment before I fell asleep in pain. It’s a good thing I wasn’t planning on becoming a surgeon, because that probably ended any shot I had at a departmental recommendation. It was also VERY embarrassing.

Perhaps you’ve had a similar experience, finding yourself unable to fight off sleep no matter how hard you tried to stay awake. Now, I’m sorry my story was so long, but like the story of Peter, James, and John, it shows how utterly impossible it is to save ourselves from our own weakness. In this way, our “sleepy eyes” actually provide a brilliant metaphor for sin, and our failure to stay awake reveals our inability to save ourselves.

And yet, we hear Jesus and Paul in our readings tonight insisting that we MUST keep awake – we MUST live in obedience to our Master – we MUST be about the work entrusted to our care – we MUST pray and keep watch, lest we fall into temptation and fail in the tasks to which we have been called. We must NOT let the Master find us sleeping – We must not fail – we must not fall back into the works of darkness.

And yet, we fail. Again, and again, and again we fail, three times in the case of those blessed saints in the garden who were unable to do what Jesus asked. For in their case, like ours, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh IS weak” (Mark 14:38). Conceived and born in sin, no amount of good intentions, focused effort, or even self-inflicted pain will ever change that – which is why sleep will come – which is another way of saying, death will come. And were it not for Jesus, who alone stayed awake in prayer, who alone endured

those trials, who alone served His Father in perfect obedience, even to death on a cross, dead is what we would remain.

But dead we are NOT! For Jesus suffered that crushing pain and entered into that sleep of death in order that you might be raised up to new and everlasting life in Him. By His agony and bloody sweat; by His cross and passion; by His precious death and burial, and by His glorious resurrection and ascension, He paid the price for your sleepy eyes and saved you from the everlasting sleep of death.

And now, through your Baptism into Christ crucified and risen, you have the victory over sleep. And it is to that victory, to that new life that you are being called again tonight. For Lent is nothing other than the call to the Baptized to wake-up and snap out of it, to “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12) that we may walk properly as in the daytime. No more orgies or drunkenness, no more sexual immorality and sensuality, no more quarreling and jealousy... not in your lives, not in your conversations, not in your entertainment, your TV screens or tablets... No more of those things you wouldn't want your master to catch you doing when He returns. Rather, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14) – NOT out of fear, NOT to “earn your way into heaven,” but for the peace and wholeness and joy of a life well lived – a return to what it means to be fully and wonderfully human – to participate as one with Christ in the light and life and joy of paradise which is yours already through your union with Him.

Yes, it is true... A day will come when you will no longer be able to fight it off – when you will enter into your final sleep in this fallen world. And when that day comes, you must not be afraid.

In fact, as a hopeless and terrified world spins out of control all around you in response to this next plague that has come around, remember who you are and whose you are. Let the world see the confident hope that you have in Christ's deliverance, and share that hope for the life of your poor, suffering, hopeless, helpless neighbor who's eyes are fixed on the stock market and the empty store shelves and the mounting death tolls. Stay awake, and fix

YOUR

eyes on Jesus who never slumbers nor sleeps. "For the Lord IS your keeper - He will

keep your life. He will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" (Psa 121). Have no fear - In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Mark

13:32-37; 14:32-42