

Are you ready? Are you awake? Have you ever missed a bus or train, or worse still, a plane? You run for the bus, the doors close. It is too late to board. There is no second chance to get that bus, you'll have to wait for the next one... unless the one you've missed was the last home that night. The most striking line in today's Gospel is spoken to the bridesmaids who weren't ready and turned up late to the wedding feast: *Then the door was locked.*

That locked door is death. Death locks the door to any more chances. That's why people have a bucket list of things to experience before it is too late. In life we are often offered second chances, because we make mistakes. Hopefully we live and learn, grateful for redemption. But no one gets a second chance after death. If you die inside the wedding feast, you are inside it forever; if you die outside it, you are outside it forever. Like Noah's ark. In the Noah story, there is a message about a door, like the one in today's parable. After Noah and his family and all the animals went into the ark, the book of Genesis says, *The Lord shut them in.* As in Jesus' parable, *the door was locked.* The other people, when they saw the flood, surely must have regretted laughing at Noah for building the ark and regretted not believing and obeying God; but it was too late. At some point it has to be too late. Second chances do not go on forever. Life in this world does not go on forever. At some point the door is shut. Is Jesus trying to scare us? Well no. He's giving practical and realistic advice. It makes sense, because we know if we put something off until tomorrow, we're less likely to make it happen. If you fail to prepare, prepare to fail. Therefore to your November and Advent bucket lists, add sacramental confession, to be ready before God our judge.

A question I heard about the gospel today wondered why the bridesmaids who were ready with oil in their lamps couldn't share their oil so that everyone could go to the feast. That might have worked had they organised it half an hour, or even one minute before the deadline. But the story tells us that at midnight it was too late. As we go through life there are many helps and the community of the Church to support us, and our families, and we can share our resources so that all of us may shine like bright lights. But we can't really share the forgiveness we've received by going to confession, even if we wished we could. Make the most of the opportunity, enjoy the second, third and fourth chances to follow Jesus more closely. Your soul is a lamp reflecting the radiance of God; the oil is God's grace to keep it bright and alive, rather than dull and dead. If you're Catholic, arrange to go to confession to top up on the oil of God's saving grace. Then you will be ready to accompany the bridegroom, that is Jesus Christ into the next

life. Through him, with him and in him we are admitted to the Father's house, to the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb.

On the battlefields of the last century, and even today when UK soldiers are in combat, there are always priests on the battlefield, precisely because life was in danger. People knew the life they were wanting to lead may be taken away. They had to accept that and prepare for the life beyond, hoping for heaven. There were no bridesmaids at the battle of the Somme to my knowledge, but millions of soldiers, some of whom were more ready to meet their God than others. The sensible ones would have spoken to the padre and received sacraments of reconciliation and anointing.

One of our Old Gregorian war dead is Fr Gervase Hobson Matthews, a monk of Downside who served as a military chaplain, offering Mass near the front line; hearing soldiers' confessions, giving the last rites to dying soldiers; burying the dead. He is believed to be the first Catholic military Chaplain killed in the second world war, aged 36 at the time of the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940. His last recorded words written in his diary were; *a priest has certainly to stay.*

Dear brothers and sisters, on Remembrance Sunday we pray for all who have died in war. We have the opportunity to pray for all the faithful departed, those we have loved and lost. We give thanks for the bridegroom that is Christ Jesus our saviour, whp gives pardon and peace through His sacrament. And we heed his words: *so stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.*