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Watchfulness

“Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant” (Luke 12:37).

I was once in a training program called CPE, clinical pastoral education, for hospital chaplains. Interns rotated weekends on call, staying overnight in a small bedroom on the top floor of the hospital, available to cover emergencies. I recall lying fully dressed on top of the bed listening for sirens and wondering what the night would hold. While I decided not to pursue this specialized ministry, one benefit from the experience was a lifelong respect for emergency room staffs, hospital personnel, EMTs, police and fire department professionals who work nights and can rev up in the moment to deal with the unexpected.

Vigilance was given the status of a beatitude by Jesus as he prepared his disciples to serve. Physical readiness was one expression of a deeper mental and spiritual alertness to the movement of the Spirit in events around them so they could respond gracefully and promptly to need.

A recent, dramatic example illustrates this. An Oregon high school coach disarmed a distraught student carrying a shotgun by embracing him and talking with him until police arrived. He said his instincts kicked in and that he knew God was in the room. A tragedy was averted by his vigilance and ability to accurately read a highly charged situation.

Jesus tells a parable about servants waiting for their master's return through the watches of the night. Luke used the parable to describe the early church's vigilance as it awaited the return of the risen Christ. What was first an expectation of the Lord's imminent return evolved into a continuous awareness of the active presence of Jesus within the church as it was extended in history.

We are that church, and a lively vigilance and awareness that grace is always at work in every situation and encounter is the essence of evangelization and ministry. Blessed are we if we stand ready to bring wisdom and love to whatever need we find before us, and to make it an opportunity for God to act with us and through us.

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