

Three surprises in heaven: Bishop Sheen tells us that we will have three surprises in heaven. The first surprise: We will be surprised to see that many people we expected to be in Heaven are not there. The second surprise: We will be surprised to see that the people we never expected to be in Heaven are there. The third surprise: We will be surprised to see that we are in Heaven. It is so because our getting to heaven is purely God's Grace. We have to cooperate with His Grace. In today's Gospel Jesus teaches us how to cooperate with God's Grace and answers the question who will be saved, when and how.

There are many examples of prediction about the end of the world. According to ancient Mayan calendar, end of the world was to come on December 21, 2012. There are many more such predictions. These false predictions suggest that no one can exactly predict the Lord's second coming hence, we are to get ready for Christ's second coming by trying to do the will of God every day through love and service and being reconciled with God and God's children on a daily basis, as suggested by today's Gospel.

The central theme of today's readings is the necessity to have faith in God's promises and be vigilant and prepared always.

The first reading cites the faith-filled preparedness of the ancient Hebrew slaves in Egypt before their mass exodus to the Promised Land. Their trusting faith in their God's promises gave them hope. We are told how their faith and hope resulted in their liberation. With expectant hope, the Hebrews sacrificed the first Passover lamb and ate the first ritual meal, as prescribed by their God through Moses. They awaited their imminent release and were prepared for it

The book of Wisdom was written about a century before the coming of Jesus, by a faithful, very literate Jew living in cosmopolitan Alexandria in Egypt. One of his purposes was to bolster the faith of fellow Jews living in a world indifferent, and sometimes hostile, to their beliefs. A favorite theme of the writer is how the providence of God has protected the chosen people throughout their history, especially during the time of their enslavement in Egypt and during the Exodus therefrom under Moses. The author of the book of wisdom in today's first reading interprets Exodus chapters 11 and 12 where, while the angel of the Lord was striking down the first-born of Pharaoh and other Egyptians, the vigilant Hebrew slaves were both offering grateful sacrifice to the Lord and eating the meat of the lamb to fortify themselves for their coming escape. That night was the first Passover. Like those Jewish slaves in Egypt, we, too, have been called to cling to the hope of a future that may seem too good to be true, and we, too, are expected to be steadfast in our faith, even when we see no signs of the fulfillment of God's promises.

In the second part of today's gospel, Jesus exhorts his followers to be steadfast in their faith and ever vigilant. He explains his point using three mini-parables. The servants of a master were entrusted with the management of the household. During Jesus' days, although stewards were slaves, they had almost unlimited power. A trusted steward ran his master's house and administered his estate. When his master was not at home, the steward was ever vigilant. He prepared himself for his master's return at any time of the day or night by always doing his duties faithfully. Jesus illustrates the same point using another mini-parable of the wise servants waiting for the return of their master after a wedding feast.

Jesus teaches us the need for constant vigilance using yet another mini-parable of the thief and the treasure. We should not lose our treasure of divine grace like the man who awoke one day to discover that a thief had stolen his wealth at night. These parables are addressed to all believers to encourage "wakefulness" and preparedness. We must be vigilant like the servant in the parable waiting for his master's unexpected return or like the wise homeowner who was well prepared for the unexpected break-in of a thief. Since the time of our death is quite uncertain, we, too, must be ever ready to meet our Lord at any moment. He should find us carrying out our task of love, mercy and service, rather than leaving things undone or half-done. He should also find us at peace with God, ourselves and with our fellowmen (Eph.4:26)

Jesus then presents the parable of the unwise steward as a warning to us. The unwise steward made two mistakes. (i) He said, "I will do what I like while my master is away." Like him, we often forget that our Lord is always with us, and that we will be accountable to him on the day of reckoning. Misuse of an office for one's own advantage or the abuse of others will bring about severe punishment, for the returning Lord will place that servant "with the unfaithful." (ii) He said, "I have plenty of time to put things right before the master comes." Nothing is as fatal to the accomplishment of a task as procrastination. Jesus also warns us that knowledge and privilege bring responsibility with them. Today, looking back on two thousand years of Christian history, we find it difficult to expect Christ's second coming during our lifetime. But we are sure to meet him at our death and we should always be ready to give him an account of our lives.

**Life messages:** 1) We need to be vigilant and ready to face the Lord. One of the traditional means for remaining alert is prayer.  
2) We need to wait for the Lord. "Waiting for Christ to return" means working for the coming of the Kingdom of God. This means doing God's will by rendering humble service to others, by combating poverty, by ending the hatred that divides us, by establishing peace among individuals and nations, by curbing

the pride that causes us to become confrontational, and by building social structures that respect the dignity of individual humans. We must wait for the Lord in our daily lives by learning to see Jesus in the least of our brothers and sisters. In other words, we must be prepared to serve Jesus in whatever form he takes. What we frequently discover in "serving" other people is that God comes to us through them.