

**“Be alert...be ready”.... but how?**  
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Holy Family

This is one of those gospels that always leaves me with a question. It says, in a variety of ways, “Be alert. Be ready.” And I always ask, “How?” I know, Jesus says “Make purses that don’t wear out,” and “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit,” but surely that isn’t to be understood literally. What is he telling the disciples, here?

Let’s set the scene. The way Luke tells it, the Transfiguration (which the church celebrated just this past Friday) has recently occurred. Peter and James and John saw with their own eyes the complete transformation of their friend and were in total awe. Coming down from the mountain, they were joined by other disciples as Jesus both healed and exorcised a deaf-mute boy. Soon, they started off toward Jerusalem, and listened to Jesus again try to prepare them for His Passion experience; they participated in the successful mission of the 70 sent out by Jesus to heal and feed and be among the people in his Name; they heard the story of the Good Samaritan and watched as Martha and Mary, each in her own way, welcomed Jesus into their home. They learned what we now call the Lord’s Prayer from him, and immediately before today’s teaching, Jesus told the now much loved story of the “lilies of the field.”

After all that evidence of who He is, He alerts them to be prepared for His death and then rising to life and return to them. “Be alert.” “Be ready.” And they were not. They were afraid and they ran and they hid, and He had to walk through doors to get their attention.

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Isaiah wouldn't have been all that surprised, I think. He was given the eyes to see and the ears to hear and the heart to know how distracted and disingenuous we become very very quickly.... Even as the chosen people of God. Isaiah is called by the Spirit of God to speak to the people of Jerusalem about the superficiality of their worship; the Spirit's word for him to say for God is: I will not listen to your prayers until you remove the evil of your doings, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. In other words, being my chosen people doesn't mean do whatever you want and then worship me with superficial sacrifices. Give me your life; live as I would live in you. That means to be willing and obedient followers of God! Do you suppose the disciples who were following Jesus also could sometimes have had false motives? Do you suppose they could have been distracted from what He really was teaching and revealing to them by their own desires for power and perhaps the overthrow of Rome and perhaps the approval of the priests and perhaps... a spirit of adventure, but safe?

The contrast is in the letter to the Hebrews. This is one of our favorite passages in all Scripture, I think. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for... the conviction of things not seen" and then, "all who died in faith... confessed they were strangers... on the earth... seeking a homeland...a better country... a heavenly one." And then, "God has prepared a city for them." That's the disciples when they are following Jesus without fear, and that's us, today, when we follow Him in trust.

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How do we develop that trust? By practicing His presence. And he gives us the gifts we need to do that. I may have mentioned in recent months a little book called

*Discernment, A Path to Spiritual Awakening*, by Rose Mary Dougherty. What a treasure it is. Primarily, Rose Mary states that discernment is a universal gift, given to every human being. It is an attitude of receiving the word and promise of God all the time; the gift of recognizing God that we might then be guided in all our decision-making... in life itself, by God's desire for us. One of my favorite quotes from it is that discernment is about "discovering God's prayer in me and then joining it."

We suffer needlessly, when we deny ourselves the experience of Christ now... when we allow ourselves to be distracted by many things. We too often think that we need to figure everything out and then all will be well and we will have time to follow Jesus later. But Jesus' promise is a reminder that with Him guiding us, all things are leading to fulfillment of life in Him now. We need to practice the presence of Christ, that we might recognize and hear him. Daily... not just in the end times or at the end of our own personal lives.

I think that's the way to being ready, to being alert, to being able to recognize the presence of God in all things. God gives us the gift; our choice is to trust it, use it, discover it, grow in it. By spending time with God. By listening and being loved. Amen.