

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 24/25, 2017 – Reflection

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call to him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the Lord for mercy ..."

(Isaiah 55: 6-7)

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock ... the croc who swallowed the clock and the hand of Captain Hook follows the Captain to see what the rest of him might taste like in Peter Pan's Neverland.

Alice goes down the Rabbit Hole in Wonderland as she follows the waist-coated, watch-watching White Rabbit who cries, "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date.

Dorothy and Toto have been captured and taken to the witch's castle, but the little dog gets away to run for help. Dorothy cries, "He got away, he got away!" The Wicked Witch appears and says, "... which is more than you will. Drat you and your dog. You've been more trouble to me than you're worth, one way or another, but it'll soon be over now. Do you see that?" (She holds up a large hourglass timer filled with blood-red sand and turns it over to mark the last remaining minutes of Dorothy's life). "That's how much longer you've got to be alive. And it isn't long, my pretty. It isn't long. I can't wait forever to get those shoes!"

All these references to time bespeak urgency, even a sense of impending doom. But that sense was never more poignant than in 1947 when a group of atomic scientists, looking at the threat and peril of the cold war especially after the horrific blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, gave to the world the Doomsday Clock. With midnight on the clock representing nuclear holocaust and the annihilation of the human race and planet earth, over the years, the hands have moved sometimes a little closer, sometimes a little farther from that terrible hour, depending on the state of the world. Today, the hands stand at two-and-a-half minutes to midnight. Only once in seventy years have the hands been any closer to doomsday.

Today, the Word of God tries to get our attention away from "Dancing With the Stars", "The View", "SportsCenter", and "Twitter" to understand that the clock is ticking on OUR mortal days. We know not the day nor the hour when our internal clock will strike midnight and we will stand before the Lord to give an accounting for our lives, all that we did, all that we failed to do, all that gave life and all that killed it. Are you ready? Are your bags all packed? Is everything in order, all the amends made, all the flaws fixed?

We live our lives, so many of us, as if we were eternal, as if there would be an endless amount of time to get it right, fix the problems, make the apologies, change our hearts, seek the Lord.

Every funeral we go to, every obituary we read, we seem to think that's for the others, but never for me. The clock strikes midnight for them, never me. The sands pour through the glass for them, never me. The hour is late for them, never me. The tolling bell mourns for them, never me.

The prophet Jeremiah warns:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, turn back to your God!"

We must not fritter away this graced time on petty peeves, old bad habits, excuses and procrastination. Time is short - it may be nigh. Put your house in order, set your affairs aright. Make amends. Offer the branch of peace.

It is close to midnight.

The poet, John Donne, saw the folly of such whistling past the graveyard:

" ... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls ... it tolls for thee."