

Vigil for Fr. Donald Senior, CP

Luke 12:35-40

[Jesus said to his disciples:]

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit;
be like those who are waiting for their master to return
from the wedding banquet,
so that they may open the door for him
as soon as he comes and knocks.

Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert
when he comes;

truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt
and have them sit down to eat,
and he will come and serve them.

If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn,
and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.

But know this: if the owner of the house had known
at what hour the thief was coming,
he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be ready,
for the Human One is coming at an unexpected hour.”

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.”

When Jesus first said this to his followers,

he was speaking about his second coming—at an unknown
and even unexpected time,

Disciples are to be always prepared and watchful

—dressed and ready, lamps lit,

like slaves intent on doing their master’s bidding at any moment.

A world with slaves and masters was most familiar in Jesus’ day,

but the metaphor falters now,

as we regard slavery a most abhorrent system,

that debases human beings

as objects to be possessed, commanded, and punished.

The master-slave metaphor is no longer a very good one

to speak about our relationship with God or Jesus.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus offers a different metaphor:

At the Last Supper, he says,

“I do not call you slaves any longer,

because the slave does not know what the master is doing;

but I have called you friends.”

He says this as he’s explaining the meaning

of his impending death
that he acts out in symbolic form — by washing his friends' feet,
an action that encapsulates his self-surrender to love,
affirming, “there is no greater love
than to lay down one's life for one's friends.”

Not only is this self-gift performed by Jesus for his friends,
but he shows them how they are to serve one another:

“I have set you an example,” he says,

“that you also should do as I have done to you.”

Friends of Jesus pour themselves out in loving service

for one another,

even to those who will not return the love in kind:

—even to Judas, who is about to hand Jesus over,

even to Peter, who is about to deny he ever knew him.

Jesus further instructs his friends to keep on

expanding the circle of beloved friends,

drawing all into God's loving embrace.

In so many ways, Fr. Don embodied this gospel mandate,

laying down his life for Jesus' friends,

and creating an ever wider circle of beloved friends.

“Dear Friends,” was the way he most often began
his homilies and his teachings.

He had an extraordinary gift for making friends.

As President and then Chancellor,

he was constantly making new friends

and inviting them to participate in the mission of CTU,

to which he was so passionately devoted.

These were not utilitarian friendships,

but genuinely deep relationships that he forged,

sharing meals, trips to the Holy Land,

and presiding at their family weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

Making friends for CTU was a pathway

by which Don helped so many people

deepen their relationship with Jesus.

He helped us see what it is to be

“dressed for action and have our lamps lit”

—not something one can conjure up for the end time moment,

but a life-long stance cultivated day after day,

a readiness at every moment to pour oneself out in loving service,

from the smallest gestures of hospitality,

like Don's seeing that every one else had something
to eat and drink before he partook,
to the setting aside of his own desires

in order to serve in a leadership role he did not seek.
(He once told me that in 1987 he agreed to be acting president
of CTU for one year on the condition that he would not be
considered for President in the search that ensued!)

There's a strange twist in the Gospel reading we heard from Luke:

The master has the slaves that are ready when he returns
sit down to eat and HE comes and serves them!

Such a thing is only comprehensible if the master is Jesus,
who has told his followers that his mission is to serve,
not to be served.

Emptying ourselves out in service to one another,

creating bonds of loving friendship

across boundaries of difference,

as did Christ, as did Don, opens us to be filled to the full
with the love and joy of Christ, who gathers all to his banquet.

When we gather at this table, as we will tomorrow,

and every time we celebrate Eucharist,

we have a foretaste of that eternal banquet,
where all Christ's friends are one day united
in a circle of love that cannot be broken even by death.

Sr. Barbara Reid, OP

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