

"PREPARING FOR THE FINAL EXAM"

You know neither the day nor the hour

Think back to your high school or college days. What was the toughest, most nerve wracking final exam you ever took? It might have been high school algebra, organic chemistry, or defending a doctoral thesis. In any case, how did you prepare for it? Was your information retention and understanding of the subject aided by a review of your highlighted sections of your text book, or your class notes; or perhaps by reference to a study guide? Did you work out a few sample problems, or review your primary references? Did you do a little detective work to get an idea of what would likely be on the exam by getting hold of exams from previous years?

Thinking down the road a bit, all of us without exception are certainly going to have to take one more final exam. Our Catholic faith holds that immediately after death the eternal destiny of each separated soul is decided by the just judgment of Jesus Christ. This doctrine of a "particular judgment" is a final exam of what we did with God's gifts of life and free will during our earthly lives. Were we good stewards of the gifts that we received?

What is important about this final exam is that we do have the questions in advance. Jesus, in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, tells us that the questions will be:

When I was hungry, did you give me food? When I was thirsty, did you give me drink? When I was a stranger, did you welcome me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was ill, did you care for me? When I was in prison, did you visit me?

The "I" is explained by Jesus as "one of these least brothers of mine"...that is, anyone we encounter who is in need.

It's that simple. We have the questions on the final, final exam - the questions by which we establish ourselves as going off to either eternal life or to eternal punishment.

It seems to me that Jesus is giving us the questions on the exam, because he wants us to pass it. If our lives to this point in time, have been lived such that we would expect to fail the exam if taken today, we shouldn't give up. There is probably time remaining to better prepare for the exam. Advance knowledge of the questions on the exam affords each of us the time to assess our own relationship with God the Father, and to redirect our lives toward the path to eternal life. The stewardship way of life, with its commitments of time, talent and treasure in service to God and one another, is a valuable signpost to help keep us on that path.

The time to commit to this is now, for as Matthew tells us: "Stay awake (that is, be prepared), for you know neither the day nor the hour".

Ed Sampson
Stewardship Commission Chairman