

**Should we know the time of the Lord's coming?
Reflections on Matt 24,42-44**

"Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt 24,42-44)

In this parable we are asked to be awake and watch like a householder who knew the time when the thief was coming. However, unlike the householder, we do not know the time when the Lord will come. From this passage of St. Matthew we are left uncertain as to whether we should know the time of the Lord's coming. This uncertainty can be resolved only by examining this parable of the householder in some detail.

As in other passages of The New Testament, the unexpectedness of the Lord's coming is compared to the intrusion of a thief by night (1 Thess 5,2; 2Pet 3,10; Rev 16,15). But whereas the householder would strongly resist the intrusion of the thief, the faithful Christian will welcome the coming of his Lord. We can not, therefore, identify the faithful Christian with the householder in this parable.

We should consider, then, what the householder and his house represent: *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5,19)*. If the thief in the parable is Jesus, and his intrusion is the Second Coming, the house represents the world, and the householder is the evil one.

"..if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have left his house be broken into" (Matt 24,43). If the 'power of this world' knew the time of the Lord's coming, he would try to resist or frustrate it - if that were possible. For this reason, the final assault against the kingdom of this world, after which the Kingdom of heaven will prevail (Rev 11,15), requires that the coming of the Lord be unexpected and sudden – as, in fact, the intrusion of a thief by night (cf. Matt 24,36-39).

Those who are awaiting the coming of the Lord are called to be awake, not to resist his entrance like the vigilant householder in the parable, but to receive him and help him to seize the whole house. We must watch, therefore, so that we are ready for that hour.

"Be awake. ..For if you are not awake, I will come like a thief and you will never know at what hour I will come upon you" (Rev 3,2-3). In this passage, it is implied that the vigilant soul will indeed know the hour of the Lord's coming. Returning to the parable, we can see how this may be possible. The vigilant soul will sense the approach of the Lord like that of a thief by night, and will perceive the signs of his entry. At that time he will know the hour of the Lord's

coming. Only to those who are asleep will the intrusion be unnoticed (1 Thess 5,4).

Given that the thief should not disturb the householder, the signs of his entering are revealed only to those who are awake, and cause a separation between those who are awake and those who are asleep: *"Then two men will be in the field, one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left"* (Matt 24,40-41).

Here, then, is the solution to the problem we encountered, as to whether the faithful Christians are expected to know the time of the Lord's coming: at present, the faithful **do not** know (Matt 24,42), but if they stay awake they **will** know the time of his coming by perceiving the signs as that time approaches. But how, in reality, are we to know when, and with which signs, the Lord will come: *"And the Lord, God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book"* (Rev 22,6-7).