

Whereas the United States Marine Corps has the motto “Semper Fidelis” or “Always Faithful.” The United States Coast Guard has the motto “Semper Paratus” or “Always Ready.” Specifically, the Coast Guard needs to be ready to launch a search and rescue operation where minutes can mean the difference between life and death. They need to be ready to respond to threats to national security that appear on our shorelines.

Indeed, it is the Coast *Guard*. Guards always need to be ready. It has been said that anyone can be a guard for five minutes, but it gets harder to be a guard for an entire night shift. All you have to do is watch and raise the alarm if you see something, but as the night drags on into the wee hours of the morning, boredom, exhaustion, and apathy can set in. One moment of inattentiveness can cost the safety of the ones you swore to protect.

And guard duty is what Paul has in mind as he writes our text from 1 Thessalonians: **“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”** As we approach the end of the church year, our focus shifts to the end of the world. In this time as always, the Lord calls us to be ready for His return. IN THE LORD WE ARE "SEMPER PARATUS" FOR HIS IMMINENT RETURN.

First, I. The Lord's return is imminent. (v. 1–5) Paul writes, **“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”**

People will ask me and have asked me, “Is the end of the world coming soon?” Usually I’ll answer them with a question: “Why do you ask that question?” People will answer with answers such as, “all the hatred all around us,” “the pandemic,” “the uncertainty with this election,” or “what is going on across the globe.”

“Is the end of the world coming soon?” Paul gives us the answer. We don’t know. We don’t know when the end of the world is coming, but these events all around us are wake up calls: pandemics, discord, and violence. These things remind us that Christ is coming soon! They don’t give us a code to know when exactly Christ will come back like you or I can read a clock or a timer. However, they make us alert like the sound of snake’s tail rattling, the crash of thunder, or a car’s brake lights turning on ahead of us.

But Paul reassures us by saying, **“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”** We as Christians know what to look for and we know how to be ready. If it was your first

day in the woods and you heard a rattling sound, you might not know to be cautious and look for a snake. If you grew up in a desert, you might not know that the sound of thunder means rain. If you've never driven before, you might not connect red lights on the back of a car with its sudden slowing down.

Dear Christians, when you see scary things in the news or in our world, don't be confused. Don't scratch your head, this is a time to lift your head, look for Jesus, and turn to Him in your troubles.

After all, II. The Lord calls us to be "semper paratus" (v. 6–7). The Lord calls us to be always ready. He tells us what is going to happen, and He tells us to be ready. Paul writes, **“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.”**

No guard who falls asleep on the job or who gets drunk on the job will remain a guard much longer. He'll get fired, or if he's in the military, he'll get dishonorably discharged. When you're a guard, you have to be always ready to sound the alarm, standing at gate watching for any threats that might approach.

For the ancient world, the night was a scary time. There were no streetlamps, and it was expensive to burn candles or lamps. A night on the town didn't have the same appeal as it does in our modern ears. The only people who were out at night were up to no good. Night was dangerous. You only went out if you needed something desperately.

In these scary times, it might seem like we're in the midst of darkness and night. Even now, Jesus can come back at any minute, so what do you want to be found doing? Do you want to be drinking too much at a party? Do you want to be in a feud with your friends or family? Do you want to be browsing a shady website on the Internet? Do you want to be shouting at the talking heads on the television?

Wouldn't it be better to be found doing those everyday wholesome things God has given us to do: going to church on Sunday, praying before bed, sitting down to dinner with your family, or raking the last of the fall leaves? Putting in an honest day's work at your job, or video chatting with your grandkids?

Part of being “semper paratus,” always ready, doesn't mean you need to go to heroic efforts and sell everything you have to live in a monastery. It means continuing on in those honest things that the Lord has given you to do: to continue in your vocations of spouse and parent, grandparent or grandchild, student or employee, Christian and citizen. We can live our lives with contentment and peace knowing that even though Christ can come again at any moment, we will be ready.

Why? Because III. The Lord equips us so that in Him we are "semper paratus." (v. 8–11) Paul continues, **“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”** God equips us with the full armor of God so that we can

withstand the assaults of the evil day. Note how He only equips us with defensive equipment: a breastplate and a helmet. He gives us a helmet and a Kevlar vest so that the bullets will not pierce our skin, but He doesn't give us any weapons. Why? Because He Himself brings the big guns.

When a guard sees the enemy crest the hill, he doesn't load his gun to fight off an entire battalion. He rings the warning bell and wakes up the general. He watches so he can summon the army if need be. Jesus Christ is the one who fights for us and who overcomes in the evil day, even as He overcame in *the* evil day.

**“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”** The end of the world is not the enemy coming to devour us, it's the calvary cresting the hill to rout the forces of evil.

The Church has been standing guard ringing the warning bell for centuries, and our Lord Jesus Christ has heard our cry. This is our plea when we say, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” On that last day, Jesus will come back to finally defeat those forces of evil and to save us eternally.

The end of the world means the end of evil, and we can be found “semper paratus,” always ready for Christ's return because He has already won the victory and claimed us as His own. Through His death and resurrection, He has taken on the punishment we deserve for our insubordination, our lack of readiness, and our sins. He has spared us on those days when we have wandered in the darkness: in the darkness of addiction, in the darkness of hatred, and in the darkness of anger.

And He equips us in baptism to have everything we need to be ready: faith, love, and hope. Faith trusts the promises of God that He is indeed coming quickly. Love gives us the patience to endure setbacks, delays, and roadblocks in that process. Hope of salvation gives us the energy and drive to keep the faith in those dark nights of the soul when it's easy to fall asleep on the job.

It's easy to be a guard for five minutes. It's hard to be a guard for an entire shift. It's not that watching somehow becomes more difficult late at night—you still do the same actions over and over again. I'm no expert, but I believe guard duty is simply watching the horizon, checking the security cameras, and watching for approaching footsteps, rinse, wash, repeat. None of those things are particularly difficult to do on their own, they just become difficult due to exhaustion.

So too, God calls us to the same simple things again and again throughout our life as we await Christ's second coming: pray, read God's Word, and receive Christ's forgiveness. The Holy Spirit works through these three things to keep us “semper paratus,” always ready, even as we see the day more quickly approaching.

May Christ who has claimed us and redeemed us use these things to keep us faithful all the days of our earthly journey until He comes again or He calls us home to Himself. Amen!