2nd Wednesday in Lent
Rolling Meadows - 1964

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 26: 45,46 (RSV) Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.

ARE YOU STILL SLEEPING AND TAKING YOUR REST?

One of the most difficult jobs in the military is standing guard. In ti of conflict the responsibility of a guard is extremely grave and important. The lives of all the men in his unit depend upon him. On guard duty a man cannot rela He cannot close his eyes and go to sleep, even unintentionally. A guard found sleeping at his post in wartime may be liable to court marshal or even execution..

It was the night of our Lord's betrayal, just before his crucifixion and death. He withdrew into the quiet and deserted Garden called Gethsemane. There H wished to find the peace and solitude necessary for prayer. With Him He took the three disciples who were closest to Him - Peter, James, and John. He wanted them to pray with Him and to stand watch with Him in the fateful hour. One might have expected them to be alert and watchful. Their friendship, their concern, their faitl the critical hour itself should have kept them awake. Three times Christ returned to the place where He had left them. Each time He found them fast asleep. The third time He asked, Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hou is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going.

You must know who this is pleading for help and company in this desperate hour. This is our Lord Jesus Christ - very God of very God, Begotten, not Made, being of one substance with the Father from all eternity. He is the God-Man for whose summons the uncalled legions of angels were waiting. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the great I AM THAT I AM, the Son of the Living God in a foreign land. And what does He say? Something so wistfully and sorrowfully human that it is almost beyond understanding - something that we have said to a friend from a sick bed or in an hour of deep loneliness and great trouble: Could ye not watch with Me one hour? Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Can't you stay and help Me through these dark waters? Won't you keep me company in My

loneliness? Here in one swift lightning moment in the darkness of the Garden we catch a glimpse of the great mysterious loneliness of the Son of God. This is not God flinging His compassion from aeons away on us who must live and die alone in the dusk of the earth. This is not God high in the sky, aloof and remote. This is God as one of us, in the very heat and the very pain of life. This is God, not with drums beating and flags flying, but lonely and alone in the darkness under the trees of the Garden.

In all the long history of mankind no other agony was ever like this, for on no other soul was ever such a burden laid. It was my sin and yours - and all the sins of all the world. We think only of our own sins and they make us afraid and torture us by day and night. But think of all the sins of all mankind and then imagine all the torture of His soul. From out of the agony of His prayers He comes with sweat like blood falling in great drops to the ground, seeking the comfort and company of those who had vowed their faithfulness and loyalty: Could ye not watch with Me one hour? Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Our Lord is alone, terribly and frightfully alone - alone at prayer - alone in His sorrow and deep grief - alone because the promises were easy and the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Peter, James, and John all slept. We grant them their sleep if they will gather strength for greater, better service to our Lord. We grant them their sleep if they will gain the strength to withstand temptations and confess their Lord. We grant them their sleep and all the dead indifference of it, if they will watch with Christ in that sad hour when all the world will be against Him. But not for this! - Or should a man have rest and sleep to store up energies for hate and come to a dull forgetting of his Lord? Why should I ever sleep or rest again if this is what I do with what I have gained? You see, this is the constant warning of our Lord - way back in Eden: Satan lieth at the door - Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

How like Peter, James, and John we are! The promises are easy - all of the easy assent which we gave at our Baptism and Confirmation - the pledges of

faithfulness and loyalty and devotion - how easy it all is to say, and how quickly we forget or even go to sleep in our lethargy. Today, as then, we are faced with the phenomenon of people who are committed to Christ, but not too deeply, who are sorry about what happened to Him, but not really. How many of us have been guilty of trying to innoculate ourselves with just a little bit of religion in order to avoid catching the real thing? You must not take your religion too seriously. It is really not necessary to make a show of your faith by being with your Lord every Sunday - to watch and pray with Him every Wednesday at every Lenten Service - to be at Communion every time. These things we don't put into words, but our lives proclaim it loudly. The Christian faith and the Christian life is all well and good at the proper time and the proper place - but you must not get carried away - you must not let it interfere with self-gratification and self-indulgence - you must not let it interfere with your sleep. And so, while our Lord goes to the Cross and suffers the deep anguish and agony of heart and soul in our behalf - for our sins, our lovelessness, and divisiveness, and contention, and greed, and hate, and pride — we are content to let Him suffer alone, to sleep on indifferently and take our rest. We utter pious phrases about the forgiveness of sins - about confession and absolution - but it is not our own sins that we are concerned about. And with this kind of shallow faith and superficial commitment we have kidded ourselves into believing that we are His disciples. The Cross has become not a dream-breaker but a tranquilizer. It is a symbol of comfort rather than of pain. We find it easier to wear the cross than to bear the cross.

In the quiet comfort and shelter of the Church we find it easy to pledge our allegiance to Christ. Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee. Tomorrow morning, however, we will all go back to our daily work. Some of you will be off to the factory or office, to making the rounds and calling on customers, to making deliveries of bread, or milk, or clean laundry, or what-have-you. Some of you will stay at home to clean the house, care for the baby, or shop for food. You children will be off to school. The point is, Will people know that we have been

with our Lord tonight - that we have watched with Him and prayed with Him? Will they know by our actions and by our conduct that He means more to us than the whol world - that we share His life - that we are willing to deny ourselves as He did - that we are ready to take up our cross and follow Him - to plunge head first into difficulties for His Name's sake - to buck the tide of lovelessness and greed and selfishness. To watch with Him and then to report on what we have learned in our watching is our great and compelling task.

Christ suffered alone. He went to the Cross alone. He endured the agonies of hell for us alone. We cannot share in that. But we can follow along - we can watch and pray - we can bear witness to those things which we have seen and heard - we can share in the results of what He accomplished for us by His own bitter sufferings and death - we can proclaim by word and deed and life that we belong to Him, that He is Savior, and Redeemer, and Lord. The hour is late and th time is short: You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to awake from sleep. Let us then cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as one does in the daytime - not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. May God give you strength and joy as you so live for Him who loved you and gave Himself for you. Amen..