

Last weekend, my son Elijah, his friend Henry, and I took a road trip to the National WWII museum in New Orleans. The next day we went to the USS Alabama Museum in Mobile and then drove home. The WWII museum is almost beyond explanation. There are many stories, or themes, to follow; I choose to follow the Faith in War Time theme (not surprisingly). I was moved by the stories and the photos of the chaplains out in the field, or on a ship, administering communion and last rites. The museum expressed the adage there are no atheists in foxholes. Many in the Armed Forces find a deeper faith, and some find a faith for the first time in their lives. Very few are non-believers.

I was a VA chaplain in seminary. There are more faith traditions held by our nations vets than traditions that I could have named. It is nearly impossible for the VA to have a chaplain for every faith tradition; instead, the chaplaincy core is cross-trained in a variety of faith traditions so that we can care for person in front of us.

Today's Gospel lesson features Jesus saying in a variety of ways that we are to be ready for our own mortality, or the judgement time, or The End, or the return of Christ (however you call it). Jesus said, "You also must be ready." The "you" in this case was his disciples and by extension, us today. I think of it this way: the disciples knew they were with the Messiah so they didn't have to be ready. Jesus told them directly, "You also must be ready."

Chaplains in WWII as they do now ask those in the Armed Forces and the veterans, are you ready? Are you prepared? Are you right with God in your faith tradition? None of us know when our life will end. Are you ready? There is a photo of hundreds of sailors with their heads lowered in prayer. It was a service held on what they thought was the day before D Day (it was actually two days before because of weather). Their military training prepared them for what they had to do; chaplains asked if they are spiritually ready for what they have to do.

Jesus said, "You also must be ready." Let me ask you a question, are you ready?

I was wondering if "be ready" is a Christian theme or if we share that theme with other religions. As it turns out, being ready, is a universal theme. Let me break it down this way.

### **Be Ready in Christianity**

**Emphasis:** Faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, good works, and seeking to live a Christlike life.

**Preparation:** Regular prayer, studying scripture, confessing sins, and striving to love God and one's neighbor.

**Outcome:** Individuals are judged based on their faith and actions, determining their eternal fate in either Paradise or away from God.

### **Be Ready in Judaism**

**Emphasis:** Focus on life and how to live it, performing mitzvot (commandments), and striving for righteousness.

**Preparation:** Obeying God's laws, living ethically, and seeking purification.

**Outcome:** Judgement occurs by God based on following the mitzvot.

### **Be Ready in Islam**

**Emphasis:** Belief in the Day of Judgment, accountability for actions, and striving for righteousness.

**Preparation:** Adhering to the core tenets of Islam, praying the daily prayers, and making good deeds.

**Outcome:** Deeds are weighed on a scale, determining one's fate in either Paradise or away from God.

### **Be Ready in Hinduism**

**Emphasis:** Karma, reincarnation, and the ultimate goal of moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).

**Preparation:** Following a path of devotion, knowledge, selfless action, meditation and self-discipline.

**Outcome:** Actions in life determine future rebirths, with the goal of unity with the divine.

### **Be Ready in Buddhism**

**Emphasis:** Samsara (cycle of birth, death, and rebirth), suffering, and the ultimate goal of nirvana (liberation).

**Preparation:** Following the Eightfold Path, which includes right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

**Outcome:** Good actions lead to favorable rebirths, with the ultimate goal of achieving nirvana.

I know that's a lot of information but do you see the trend? First, all the world religions (I could have added Sikhism, Shinto and Bhai as well) are saying to be ready – what we do in this life effects what happens in the next life. For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the next life is either in union with God or separated from God. For the other religions, it has to do with ascending each life with the goal of unity with God. Secondly, the preparation that each religion has is summed up with ethical living, being in harmony with our Creator and our neighbor. Lastly, each religion expresses that we are born, live and die. What we do with the middle part – the live part – is to not be tied down with physical life but instead strive for what we do not see.

Think of it this way: if you were to stand on the moon and look at the world religions, you'd see that they all say, "You also must be ready" and the preparation looks similar (if not identical, just using different words). It isn't just the military that asks if you are ready. All the world religions ask the same thing.

Back to our faith tradition, I prefer to start at the beginning when looking at my own preparedness. On page 845 of the Book of Common Prayer, we have the catechism, or teaching of the Church. In question and answer format, here it what it says.

Q. What are we by nature?

A. We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

Q. Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?

A. From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.

Q. Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

A. Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.

Q. What help is there for us?

A. Our help is in God.

Q. How did God first help us?

A. God first helped us by revealing himself and his will, through nature and history, through many seers and saints, and especially the prophets of Israel.

What is distinctly Christian (and Jewish) is that we do not believe the answer, or ability, resides within us but instead resides with God. We know this through nature, history, seers, saints and especially the prophets of Israel. Our preparation, like the other world religions, has to do with prayer and reading (meditating) on Scripture, asking for forgiveness, and seeking to love God and our neighbor. It is not in us to forgive ourselves. What help is there for us? Our help is in God.

If you are wondering if you are ready, let me ask you this: are you allowing God to help you? Are you asking for help in prayer, in forgiveness and help in loving God and our neighbor? Our preparation comes to knowing it's not in us to help ourselves. Thanks be to God that we have a Savior who is always ready to help, to forgive, and lead us in love and joy. So that no matter what the storms, or the battles, in our life, God is ready, always ready, to guide and help.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.