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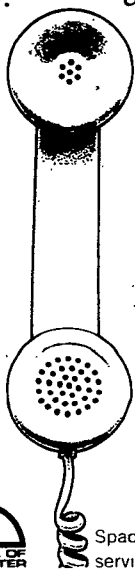
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Columnists

The necessity of being ready

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's readings: (R3) Matthew 25:14-30; (R1) Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

As the Civil War threatened to engulf the United States, President Lincoln penned a brief note to the governor of Pennsylvania: "I think the necessity of being ready increases. Look to it." That was all. Lincoln underlined the word "ready."

That brief message sums up Chapters 24-25 of Matthew's Gospel.

In those chapters, Matthew offers three parables about the end of the world and the coming of the Lord. All three stress one point: Be ready!

Sunday's parable is another judgment scene. The man who went on a journey is the ascended Christ. His return is the judgment. That He will return is certain; when He will return is uncertain. In the interim, He expects us to use our time and talents.

The first two servants in the parable doubled their money by making wise investments. The third did nothing. The reward to the first two might not seem a reward — they were given more work! But isn't that also true in industry? One works to get to the top. Once there, do not one's responsibilities increase? Here "larger affairs" imply getting to the top, becoming friendly with the boss. This is the true reward, which brings its own joy through closeness to Christ.

The third servant played it safe. He buried his talent. He feared failure, and failed precisely because he did nothing. Do we not despise the miser — the one who does nothing with his money, but hoards it?

In the middle of George Eliot's classic novel, *Silas Marner*, one finds the theme of the novel. It is a masterful contrast between the effects of gold and of a child on a human person.

Gold, as Eliot put it, needed nothing. Not so the golden-headed baby, Eppie, whom Silas found one Christmas night on his doorstep. She was a bundle of needs.

Gold demanded nothing of Silas but that he

A Word for Sunday

earn more gold — it enslaved him to his work. The child, Eppie, required everything of Silas. She made him leave his work to watch over her rompings in room or in fields, delighting in every living sight and sound.

Gold became as God. Eppie brought him to God, to Church, for Silas sought the best for her.

God condemned the man who buried his talent, not because God is greedy, but because of what greed can do to a person. The parable, therefore, is not a lesson in economics. Its point is against a do-nothing attitude in the face of the Lord's coming.

Similarly, the author of Proverbs recommended the industrious woman as an ideal wife to the young men of the day.

The Book of Proverbs is a how-to manual for young men on getting ahead in court life. In light of today's burning issue of women's rights, on first reading it might seem hopelessly chauvinistic. If one looks at the passage in relation to the whole, however, one will see that it most certainly is not. Instead of decrying the follies of "womanizing," as the book does in so many passages, Proverbs here sets forth the kind of woman men ought to seek.

The woman to be sought is the one "who fears the Lord" — the soul of beauty is the soul. Such a one's value is "far beyond pearls," the tawdry jewelry of the prostitute. The God-fearing woman is "an unfailing prize."

Last week, St. Paul spoke of "those who had fallen asleep in the Lord." This week, he speaks of another kind of sleep, the failure to remain alert. "I think the necessity of being ready increases (with each day). Look to it!"

Trust in God alone

By Cindy Bassett

From the Royal Journals of King Hezekiah, King Judah, 716-687 B.C.

When I became king, the nation of Judah was in a terrible state. The Hebrews had foolishly turned away from God because they no longer believed in Him. Everywhere, shrines and altars had been erected to Baal and other false gods. The doors of the beautiful Hebrew temple had been nailed shut so that no one could enter to worship there. The whole nation was worshipping the idols of the enemy nations that threatened to conquer them. The result was not peace but constant fear in the hearts of the Hebrews.

Fortunately Isaiah, a great of prophet of God, lived in Judah. Isaiah came to speak with me often and, through him, I received many messages from God on how to rule the people. One of Isaiah's messages was to fortify Judah against the foreign invaders. "But!" Isaiah said, "the most important thing is to place your trust in God. He alone will save you."

The first task I set myself about was reopening the temple to the one true God. I ordered the destruction of all the altars and shrines to the false gods. On the day we rededicated the temple, it was filled to capacity. On the altar, the Levite priests offered prayers and sacrifices for the Hebrew people. And we made a new covenant with God that day, promising that we would worship Him with all our hearts; never again would we turn to false gods.

In the 14th year of my reign as king of Judah, a great test of our faith occurred. King Sennacherib of Assyria and his many armies came to invade our country. I called together all of our soldiers and told them: "Do not be afraid of this king and his mighty forces. We have a far greater power on our side. Place your trust in the Lord God to fight for us!"

A few days later, my forces and I received a letter from King Sennacherib. It stated: "Do you think it will do any good to plead for your lives with God? King Hezekiah is forcing you to commit suicide by staying here, for I am going to invade Judah and conquer you soon! And your God can do nothing about it!"

As soon as I had read this letter, I placed it before God in the temple and prayed. "Oh Lord, please save your people. We have

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abolished our false gods and look to you alone for our help, but the King of Assyria has mocked you and us with his bold claims. Help us in our great trouble!"

Again the prophet Isaiah came to me with a message from the Lord. "I, the God of the Hebrews, know well all that King Sennacherib has done. But do not be afraid. Neither he nor his armies shall enter Jerusalem, for I will defend you for My Name. All those who continue to trust in Me shall be greatly blessed!"

That night, King Sennacherib and his army camped outside Jerusalem. Suddenly, they were struck by a strange plague and began to die. When the king saw this, he fled from the camp and went back home. When he arrived, he went directly to the temple of Baal. But while he prayed to his false god, his own sons came and murdered him. We had trusted in God and we had won the battle.

For the rest of my life, I told people everywhere about this great miracle so they, too, would come to trust in God above all else. His great mercy and loving kindness last forever. Isaiah continued to give me many messages from God throughout my reign as king of Judah. But the greatest message of all was that God would send a Savior, who would transform the whole world.

"See my servant, whom I uphold — my Chosen One, in whom I delight. I have put my Spirit upon him; he will reveal justice to the nations of the world. He will be gentle — he will not shout nor quarrel in the streets. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the dimly burning flame. He will encourage the fainthearted, those tempted to despair. He will see full justice given to all who have been wronged. He won't be satisfied until truth and righteousness prevail throughout the earth, nor until even distant lands beyond the seas have put their trust in Him" (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Scripture references: Isaiah 36-38