

Ps 116 (Tape)

The old liturgical litany of the Saints has a series of invocations to the Lord: these are some of them —

From a sudden & unforeseen death,	Lord deliver us
From anger, hatred and all ill-will,	" " "
From lightning & tempest,	" " "
From the scourge of earthquake	" " "
From plague, famine & war	" " "
From everlasting death	" " "

Every year, throughout the world, and here in HK, many people suffer & die from one or other of these afflictions — the events often make headlines; but in our prayers now, let's remember especially the people involved, those who've died tragically, whose names perhaps have reached our newspapers but who have not yet evoked a prayer for them from our lips.

PRAYERS

I've been deliberately focusing these Nidday Prayers recently on praying for the dead — our own relatives & friends, the victims of war and strife, and today, of natural disaster and unforeseen circumstances. There can be grim thoughts, I know, but they shouldn't be frightening or discouraging. And after all, it is November, traditionally a month of special prayer for the dead. If we are uncomfortably reminded of the coming certainty of our own leaving this world we've known, perhaps this feeling is a gentle hint from God or Father ~~to~~ to be prepared.

At Mass today, the feastday of St Gertrude, a German Benedictine nun, the Gospel reading is one of Our Lord's little stories illustrating the Kingdom of God, the one about the 10 virgins who were supposed to be waiting to escort a new bridegroom to the house of his bride. There was some delay, so, with the heat from their burning oil-lamps & because it was already late in the evening, the 10 of them became drowsy and eventually fell asleep. But 5 of them hadn't been very careful about their job — they hadn't foreseen the delay & so didn't bring enough oil with them. When eventually the bridegroom's procession got

under way & the girls were awakened by the commotion, then 5 found their lamps were burning very low. The others hadn't enough ^{oil} to spare, so the 5 had to go off quickly to try & get some more for themselves — and when they came back the procession had already gone. They rushed to the house, but the door was already closed & barred, and despite their knocking and calling, they weren't allowed in because the master of the house didn't know who they were and in any case the feasting had already begun.

This story has been used a lot in traditional Christian spirituality as an example of constant prayer and watchfulness; and perhaps some of its details have been overworked in the process. Our Lord told it simply as a story, with a point — we never know when exactly to expect God's coming in our lives. So, we have to be always on the watch, prepared, ready to meet God & greet Him wherever and whenever He appears.

The time of our death is, of course, His final coming into our personal lives, and the way He'll find us then will be most decisive for us. But this isn't His only coming — the others, all times of grace, are important for us too, so we must know how to recognize Him in

all the events of our lives and in what happens around us. So, all the world can become for us, once we've learned how to read it, what it in fact is — God's newspaper, telling us about Himself, His plans, ideas, what He's doing.

Our own newspapers too, when they tell us of human tragedy & suffering, should ~~even~~ help us find God — of course, also, by the prayers we offer for the victims of human wickedness and of what we call "Acts of God". We call them that — let's try to really see God's hand in them, & in everything that happens, not just the grim events

15 Dreck of the Deutschland (Hopkins)