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Once upon a time at feasts Kings and queens were often entertained by jesters. One day a court jester said something so foolish that the king handed him a staff and told him, "Take this and keep it until you find a bigger fool than yourself." Some years later the king was dying. "I am about to leave you," he told his family and friends gathered around his bed. "I am going on a very long journey, and I shall not return to this place..." At this, the jester stepped forward and asking permission to speak, "Your Majesty, may I ask you a question? When you journeyed abroad visiting your people, staying with your nobles or paying diplomatic visits to other kingdoms, your heralds and servants always went before you making arrangements for you. May I ask what preparations your Majesty has made for this journey you are about to take?" "Alas!" he answered, "I have made no preparation." "Then," the jester said, "take this staff with you, for now I have found a bigger fool than myself!"

One of the morning hymns which priests say goes like this:
'My destined time is fixed by thee, and Death doth know his hour.
Did warriors strong around me throng, they could not stay his power,
No walls of stone can man defend, when thou thy messenger dost send'.

The foolish person in Gospel terms is not the one who is intellectually challenged but the person who lives His life in this world without reference to the next. One of the Psalms puts it like this; 'The fool says in his heart there is no God above'. The man in last Sunday's Gospel was called a fool because he was so busy storing up goods for himself in this world that when the Lord called him expectantly he was 'caught on the hop'. And in the story of the ten bridesmaids five of them were described as being foolish because when the bridegroom came unannounced they were caught napping. These stories, Jesus told, are also for us so that we don't fall into the same trap.

The old catechism puts it succinctly, "it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgement". Since we only get one shot at it,

getting it right is not an option. This life is not a rehearsal, it's the real thing.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Some of the saints have said that one of the more subtle temptations of the Evil One is to kid us into thinking that we have plenty of time. Don't fall for that one.

The saints didn't. When **St Theresa** was on her deathbed she said she was looking forward to be forever united with her Heavenly Bridegroom. Towards the end of his life: **St John XXIII** was heard saying to his secretary, "My bags are packed and I'm ready to go". The saintly King **Edward the confessor** seeing his friends grieving at his approaching death said ""Do no cry, I am about to leave the land of the dying to go to the land of the living".

If those sentiments can find a place in our hearts we are unlikely to be caught unawares when the Master eventually comes.