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A young man was in the market place in Bagdad when he saw a woman casting threatening glances at him. He recognised her instantly as Death, and terrified he ran to his master begging him for a horse so that he could flee the city. When asked the reason for his sudden departure he said, 'I've just seen death in the market place and she looked at me in a threatening manner. Please, please give me a horse so that I can get away as fast as I can to Somara. 'The master gave him the horse, wished him God speed and the young man galloped like a crazed man to Somara, twenty miles away. Then his master went down to the market place where he too saw Death. He went up to her and asked why she was casting threatening looks at his servant. I wasn't threatening him, Death replied. 'I was surprised to see him in Bagdad, because tonight I have an appointment with him in Somara.'

One of the morning hymns in the prayer of the church 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'.

One of the more persistent themes in the Gospel is that of being alert - ready to meet the Master when he comes.

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. As it says in one of the Psalms, 'The fool says in his heart there is no God above'. The man in last Sunday's Gospel was called a fool because he indulged his body which is corruptible at the expense of his soul which is immortal. When the Lord called to judgement he was

taken by surprise. And in the story of the ten bridesmaids five of them were foolish because when the bridegroom arrived unexpectedly at midnight they weren't ready to meet him.

The old catechism states, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after death comes judgement". Since we only get one shot at life, getting it right is not an option.

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 deceive us into thinking that we have plenty of time.

But the saints themselves didn't fall for this trick. When **St Theresa** was on her deathbed she said that she longed for death so she could 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 these sentiments make sense to us we are unlikely to be caught unawares when the Master arrives expectantly or not.