

Matthew 25: 1-13

Jesus said “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

There is a natural temptation to feel sorry for the foolish bridesmaids. After all, it wasn't really their fault that the groom was late and couldn't share his oil with them? To think like this is to miss the point. The oil symbolises personal virtue, something that is impossible to share with others. Those with full oil flasks are those who live faithful and loving lives, active in good deeds.

Jesus teaches us that simply belonging to the wedding party – The Church – isn't enough, we must back it up with good works. In Matthew's Gospel we learn that these good works include bearing witness to God's kingdom by welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned (25:31-46), and making disciples of all nations (28:19-20). We must live vigilantly, undertaking the tasks that we have been appointed to do, in preparation for the Master's return.

This Sunday's Readings: **32nd SUNDAY YEAR A** **8th November 2020**

Keep Watch and Being Prepared



The cessation of public worship over the next four Sundays, comes as the liturgical year closes and we enter into Advent. Our Gospel for the next three Sundays are all taken from Matthew 25, the final chapter before Jesus' passion and crucifixion. Jesus is teaching about the 'end times' - the reign of God - he calls on us to 'stay awake', 'to be watchful',

'to be ready' to greet the Lord when he comes again.

Perhaps this 'enforced lockdown' is an opportunity for us to be still, to find space in our normally hectic lives, to reflect: 'Am I ready to greet the Lord?' Because without doubt he will come on a day and at an hour we do not know. Let us use this unexpected opportunity to draw closer to the Lord and to our neighbour.

Opening Prayer

God of power and mercy, protect us from all harm. Give us freedom of spirit and health in mind and body to do your work on earth.

Wisdom 6: 12-16

Wisdom is bright, and does not grow dim. By those who love her she is readily seen, and found by those who look for her. Quick to anticipate those who desire her, she makes herself known to them. Watch for her early and you will have no trouble; you will find her sitting at your gates. Even to think about her is understanding fully grown; be on the alert for her and anxiety will quickly leave you. she herself walks about looking for those who are worthy of her and graciously shows herself to them as they go, in every thought of theirs coming to meet them.

The Book of Wisdom is attributed to King Solomon (991 BC), but in fact, it is much later, written in the last century B.C., influenced greatly by modern Greek thought. Today's passage reflects on the quest for wisdom. Wisdom, the author teaches, is an attribute of God, who alone possesses it in its fullness and in which he allows us to share. Therefore, to possess wisdom is to possess God. This gift of life is offered to all, but we must be 'awake' and 'ready' to recognize and welcome it.

After his conversion in his thirties, St Augustine reflected:

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient... You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you... You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace."

Psalm 62

*O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water.*

*So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory.
For your love is better than life, my lips will speak your praise.*

*So I will bless you all my life, in your name I will lift up my hands. My
soul shall be filled as with a banquet, my mouth shall praise you with joy.
On my bed I remember you. on you I muse through the night for you have
been my help; in the shadow of your wings I rejoice.*

Thessalonians 4: 13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

To understand today's confusing passage from Thessalonians we need to appreciate that at the time of writing, Paul had been persuaded that he would live to see the return of Christ, but at the same time, he uses imagery from Jewish apocalyptic writings to describe the resurrection of believers. The clear message remains, however: 'Christ will come again.' This is the source of our hope and consolation.

Alleluia, Alleluia! *Stay awake and stand ready, because you do not know the hour when the Son of Man is coming. Alleluia!*

(Gospel & Reflection overleaf)

Prayer over the Offerings

Look with favour, we pray, O Lord, upon the sacrificial gifts offered here, that, celebrating in mystery the Passion of your Son, we may honour it with loving devotion.

Prayer after Communion

Lord, we thank you for the nourishment you give us through your holy gift. Pour out your Spirit upon us and in the strength of this food from heaven keep us single-minded in your service.