

November 12, 2023
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "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, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Background:

In just two weeks, we will celebrate the Feast of Christ the King and this liturgical year will end. As the liturgical year ends, the Church selects readings that will help us focus on the coming reign of God. Throughout scripture, light, oil, and lamps are used as symbols for the word of God. A wedding banquet is also a familiar symbol for the great celebration that awaits at the final establishment of the total and complete reign of God.

The parable of the ten virgins is told with an understanding of the typical wedding of the day in mind. At the time when this parable was being told by Jesus, retold by the early Christians, and finally recorded as part of the Gospels, a wedding usually unfolded in stages. The families arranged the marriage, often while the groom and bride-to-be were still young. With the betrothal, the couple was technically married, but each continued to live with their own families. Finally, when all the financial matters were worked out between the two families, the groom then went to take the bride into his home, to consummate the wedding, and for them to begin to live as husband and wife. This is when the celebration would begin. The virgins in the Gospel were most likely part of the bridal procession, waiting for the arrival of the groom and standing as witnesses to the consummation of the marriage. When the groom would arrive, it was not uncommon to try and catch those waiting napping.

For the early Christians, as they tell this parable from their perspective, the wedding banquet becomes a symbol of what God is preparing for the faithful at the end of time. Jesus himself had used the wedding banquet as a symbol of the end time fulfillment. Hence, the bridesmaids wait in darkness, without knowing when the groom will finally appear. Lastly, when the groom does appear, a separation occurs between the faithful and foolish bridesmaids.

The parable stresses the point that it is their preparedness that separates the wise from the foolish. Both the wise and the foolish have been invited to keep vigil, both have brought their lamps, both have fallen asleep. The only thing that separates them is the fact that the wise have made adequate preparations. When you take note that the wise did not give of their surplus oil to the foolish, this suggests that whatever it is that one must do to be prepared for the coming is not something that one person can do for another or that can be borrowed. Everyone must make his or her own preparations.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some of the things you did to prepare for the last wedding that you attended?

2. How is this parable like others parables told about the kingdom God? How is it different?
3. In the parable, all the virgins are said to have fallen asleep. How do you relate to that part of this parable?
4. Have you ever been awakened by an awareness of God's presence in your life?
5. In a similar way, have there been times when you were asleep to the presence of God?
6. Have you ever acted with a sense that there may not be enough? Where does that sense come from?
7. By sending the "foolish" away to purchase oil for themselves, they are not able to continue their vigil or share in the celebration. Do you experience a sadness for them not being able to part of the community?
8. Can you talk to God about whatever this parable is awakening within you or perhaps you desire to have God awaken some aspect of your relationship with God or those around you?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for November 12, 2023, the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire; Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate. For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence, and whoever for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care; because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude.

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God. You are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory,
For your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you.
Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and my mouth shall praise you.
I will remember you upon my couch, and through the night-watches I will meditate on you:
You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words.

Jesus told his disciples: "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 brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Excerpts from Wisdom 6:12-16; Psalm 63:2-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and Matthew 25:1-13

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for November 12th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel from Matthew is the parable of the ten virgins who went out with their lamps to meet a bridegroom, and the bridegroom got delayed. Five wise virgins brought extra oil for their lamps; they were prepared and were able to go into the wedding feast with the bridegroom when he arrived. The five foolish virgins were locked out of the feast because they were off procuring lamp oil when the bridegroom showed up, and they were not able to accompany him into the feast. Jesus compared this feast to the kingdom of heaven, adding, "Those who were ready went into the feast. Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The other readings also refer to the advantages and benefits of wisdom, to the accessibility of wisdom for those who seek it, to waiting in readiness, and to hope for accessibility to the Kingdom. In the first reading from Wisdom, wisdom is personified as a woman, and described this way: "Wisdom is readily perceived by those who love her. For whoever keeps vigil for Wisdom's sake, she graciously appears to them, resplendent and unfading." Psalm 63 exclaims, "My soul thirsts for my God whom I seek. Through the night watches, I will meditate on you. As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes, "Jesus died and rose. God, through Jesus, will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. The Lord will come and the dead in Christ will rise. Then we who are alive will be caught up together with them. We shall always be with the Lord."

Understood in the Gospel, if not spoken directly, are these several related points: It is wise to be prepared. You will miss out if you are not prepared at the necessary time. No one knows when this time will be. The oil that will keep the lamps lit is the doing of good deeds that will keep you prepared. Some such good deeds are specified later in this chapter, in verses 35 and 36: "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave

me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” These verses will be part of the Gospel two weeks after this one, on the feast of Christ the King.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!