

November 8, 2020

Wis 6:12-16; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13

We put a lot of attention to being prepared for things. When we are younger and are going on a date we put attention into planning, into how we look, and what we will say. When getting together with friends we select a place and a time, we get things ready and organized. In later years we plan for retirement, we plan how to spend money, we plan how to speak to relatives, we plan for the birth of a child. However, one thing that may bring to mind monumental planning is a wedding. There are so many details, so many things that need to be planned a year in advance, so much family planning and negotiation that has to be done. It is not a surprise that Jesus selects the image of a marriage to speak to us about the greatest event of our life - that meeting him when he comes - but it is strange how little we can be prepared.

The virgins in the Gospel parable were performing a special task of welcoming the groom and accompanying him in the wedding procession. They had to be prepared to do this, and by going in with him during the procession, they would be admitted to the great feast and share in joy and all the bounty of that feast. But before he came they had time ... time to wait ... time they could use for preparation or leisure. We also have time to wait for the coming of Jesus at the end of our lives on Earth. This parable about preparation for the final judgement - and in love Jesus wants us all to hear.

So if the virgins symbolize us, and our need to be prepared, what is the the story with the oil and the lamps? This is how Jesus tells us to prepare ourselves for his coming. Jesus uses the image of light and lamps many times. He says that he is "the light of the world," he tells us that we are to be like lamps on a lamp stand shining out for others to see. When we do the will of the Father, we shine out like lamps; when we care for others in love, we shine like lamps; when we treat others without manipulation but in fairness and justice, we shine like lamps. When we do the will of the Father, as Jesus did, we spread that light of Christ to the world - we become the beacon that guides others to do likewise - and we help to spread the light of Christ to a world that is too often slipping into spiritual darkness.

But for a lamp to shine it must be fueled. This is the central difference between the two sets of virgins. They all had lamps - they were ready to spread the light. The difference was their oil. Some were prepared and had a good stock of oil, the others were not. In order for the

light to shine, our lamps must be filled by the oil which is the Spirit of God. We refill our oil when we join together in prayer. We refill our oil when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist. We refill our oil when we allow Jesus to fill us in our times of encountering Jesus privately. Jesus' point in the parable is that you have to take the opportunities to do this while there is time. The foolish virgins had no oil left when the groom arrived. They had not planned properly for the arrival of the groom - they assumed they knew when he was coming and so they just did the minimum needed to have oil when he got there. The wise ones wanted to be prepared for the groom on his timetable, not their own, they wanted to be sure that they were ready and could hold out their lamps to properly greet and honor him.

It can seem strange that the ones with oil don't give some of their oil to the others - doesn't sound too caring. However, the point is that we cannot give away their oil to someone else. The filling with oil is a process that is individual and occurs because of one's personal relationship with God. It is with some sadness that they suggest that the foolish ones go to the merchants to get more - it is midnight - no one is out in the market selling. The point is that now that the groom is here, there is no time to get any oil. You waited too long, you tried to do it on your own schedule and now it is too late to do what you should have already done.

The saddest point comes when the groom passes and they cannot accompany him. They call out "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" He looks out at faces that are in the dark, with no light in their lamps to be good of another, and no light to illuminate their own faces. He replies "I do not know you." I can't see your face to recognize you. Without the personal relationship that develops from a lifetime of acquiring oil - we are strangers to Jesus. We can gather just enough oil for our own needs - rarely going to the font of oil that is Jesus. As a result, we do not shine much light to the world. And with so few trips to him to be filled, we have not developed a personal relationship with him.

Jesus reminds us of the need to maintain that relationship with him. That relationship supplies us with the oil for our own lives, and if we keep going to him, an overabundance of this oil that makes our light shine brighter and brighter. A bright light coming from his oil that spreads Jesus' own light out the world; and the frequent trips to the supply of that oil builds a relationship with the giver that is so close that we will not be left outside, but be among those selected to come into the banquet at the end of time. Only, the wise who keep their lamps full and shine brightly will enjoy in the treasures of Jesus for eternity - so be sure to prepare.