

## 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

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."

Mt 25:1-13

The Master paints a masterful picture: ten young women waiting in the silence of the night. They are finely dressed; they are prepared for the bridegroom to come to the party. When the happy anticipation exhausts them, they slowly fall asleep.

The sudden cry in the night, the movement, the quick preparations. One masterful detail that allows us to know those girls better: the oil. Half of them don't have enough oil. They were not ready for a long wait.

Why is the Master telling us that detail? Who are these girls?

The oil is the key. Why would these girls have so much oil that it's enough to burn through the night? They must love this particular wedding, they must love the bridegroom. Maybe it is the most important party of their lives, maybe it is the first. Their loyalty to the bridegroom and to the whole occasion makes them overprepared. They wait so intently that every detail must be in order. Nothing escapes their attention. They are guided by love.

Half of the girls aren't so precise. Why? Maybe they are older and this is not their first party. Maybe they don't know the bridegroom. Maybe they really don't like doing this but some mysterious family connection or some binding tradition makes them sit at the gate in the middle of the night. They seem to have lost their heart for the wedding, but they try to do an okay job. They show up, they bring stuff, but you know: the details sometimes slip. They dutifully fit the party into their schedule. When the schedule failed, so did they.

So why would Jesus tell us this story? With unexpected shock, I think I recognize the unwise virgins. They catch my eye because they don't seem to recognize what is truly holy in life. For them, it all is a chain of events, a boring repetition of rites. They attend out of propriety, but don't put their heart into it. They keep up appearances but can't fake their interest.

You can see them everywhere in the Church: from random anonymous churchgoers, through priests and deacons, all the way to the cardinals. On their surface, they look like everybody else, but you start recognizing slowly that their attention is somewhere else.

They might flip through the bulletin during Mass or spend time watching the rest of the congregation. They often don't know what they are saying during the liturgies, even if their lips are moving. In heavy cases, they even go as far as recently infamous former cardinals who might keep their houses on the beach or buy high value properties in London to fund their parallel life.

They could be clever and efficient, they might even look very pious, but at the end, the simple fact is that they don't wait for the Bridegroom anymore. When that happens, they lose their identity, and they lose their purpose.

On the other side are the wise virgins. They are often much less visible, much less obnoxious. Quietly and humbly, they worry about their prayers and about the authenticity of everything they do. They hope that God's mercy will somehow overcome their imperfections, but they never stop trying to add their own effort to the gift of God's incoming grace.

Their faith is a constant effort to reach through the darkness of humanity to the brightness of their Creator. Deep down in their hearts, they ask themselves every day if they are for real. They spend long hours trying to make everything they do in front of God as perfect as possible. If they did not share the oil with the foolish virgins, it is because the perspective of not greeting the bridegroom properly was for them too much to bear.

You can meet the wise virgins everywhere. Some writers call them “the hidden Church.” They are the ones who taught us faith and who are constantly giving testimony to us about the real Body of Christ offered to the Father.

The story of the ten virgins is the vision of the Church waiting for the fullness of the revelation of God’s love. Jesus describes the endless complexity of a human soul when facing the mystery of God’s presence. He asks you and me not to give up the longing for the beloved Master.

God is not delayed and He is not putting us to the test; He is simply inviting us to grow to the fullest capacity of our love. Only then we are able to recognize His voice and rejoice in His arrival.