

## From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembere

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A – November 8, 2020

### Wise and Foolish Virgins

I am pretty sure everyone will agree with me that waiting is a part of human nature.

- We wait for the traffic lights to turn green.
- When we go to a restaurant, we wait for our food to be prepared and served.
- When we go to a doctor's office, we wait to be called in.

There is, however, a waiting I think is more profound than any of these waiting scenarios I just described. I am talking about waiting for the second coming of Jesus...that moment when we experience the Beatific vision, being with God in heaven in the company of all the Angels and Saints. During the Mass we pray "*As we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ.*" In the creed we say, "*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.*"

When is this second coming going to happen? No one knows. Though some people have predicted this second coming of Jesus, what is important is not *when* it's going to happen but *how* prepared we are when it does. When Jesus comes, will He find us ready?

We hear in scriptures today: "*Stay awake and be ready for you do not know what day your Lord will come.*" This is the essence of Jesus' parable today; the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. It is a story of the bride and the bridegroom and those waiting in attendance.

Listen again to the lines of our Gospel passage: *“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”* This image is borrowed from the customs and practices of Jesus’ time.

The focus of the Israelite wedding was not on the bride the way our focus is today. The focus was on the bridegroom. Here is the custom: night will fall and the bridegroom - dressed for the night - will leave his own parents’ home. He will cross the village/town and go to the home of his fiancé and accompany her back across the town/village to his own home where the wedding celebration would take place.

In the meantime, the guests (especially the bridesmaids, groomsmen and other attendants) – with lamps lit - would gather and then accompany the bridegroom on this journey to and from. This is the image that Jesus presents to us today.

Jesus says, *“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”* Remember, this is ancient Israel. There is no electricity. It is very dark. Today we take nighttime for granted because it does not pose any problem for us. We have light in our cars. We have light in whatever building we go into. We can negotiate our way conveniently at night. But not during Jesus’ time. It was really dark. And if you were operating in any capacity at night, you had better have your lamp lit and plenty of oil to keep it going. This is the setup for the story that we hear. We hear five bridesmaids were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise ones did.

Then we hear that the bridegroom is delayed. Who knows why he is delayed; no one does. But suddenly the bridegroom arrives! What follows is this:

- The five bridesmaids who are wise were prepared; they had plenty of oil so they sprang up and lit their lamps.

- The five foolish bridesmaids were not prepared; they had no oil. They were not well stocked.

So, who goes into the party? The ones who - through a long night of waiting - sprang up because they were well prepared.

Who does not get in? The foolish ones who were not prepared, not well stocked.

### **How do we read this?**

All Christians wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ. Christ, the Bridegroom, is coming. We, the Church, are the bride. He is coming to consummate this wedding. Marriage is the highest level of intimacy. We are waiting in joyful hope. Some people are ready with oil in their lamps, others are not.

### **What is a well-stocked lamp?**

Who are the wise waiters? The well-stocked oil lamp stands for Divine life given to us at our Baptism. We were presented with Light at our Baptism and told to keep that Light of Christ burning brightly in us.

It stands for prayer, good works, corporal works of mercy, study of sacred Scripture, life of love and all the ways the life of Jesus remains alive in us. That is a well-stocked lamp. We are called to check and see how we are doing.

One last detail! When the Bridegroom appeared, some of the foolish virgins asked the wise ones for some of their oil, but the wise ones refused. Is that uncharitable? I would say no, it is simply stating a fact; something in the spiritual order which is - if you have not spent your whole life cultivating these virtues at the end of your life - you should not expect someone else to give you the fruit of their own cultivation.

Last Sunday we celebrated All Saints who are in heaven with God. They cannot work out our salvation with fear and trembling. When Christ comes, He will address us individually. When I was hungry did YOU give me food to eat, naked did YOU clothe me, sick or in prison did YOU come to my cell?

The question I would like you to ask yourselves today is: how are you waiting for Jesus' coming? Wisely or foolishly?

**“Stay awake and be ready for you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”**