

## THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

### **A Wedding Like We've Never Encountered!**

Traditions at weddings can be quite unique. Even though we all know about the common elements – white wedding dresses, an exchange of rings, a kiss at the end, etc. – weddings also have things unique to the ones celebrating them. And some of those are unique elements can be difficult for outsiders to understand.

That is all the more the case when trying to understand how a wedding unfolded in Jesus' day. What's with the bridegroom arriving at midnight? We can only speculate. The first hearers of Jesus' parable, though, probably had some sense for how all that worked. Otherwise, the parable would not have been effective. It would not have been a good, familiar jumping off point for talking about the kingdom of God.

### **The Symbols Guide Us...**

From the very beginning the story is steeped in symbolism. At an unexpected moment, in the darkness of night, the Bridegroom arrives. All ten of the bridesmaids are asked to come out and meet him. Lamps will be necessary. But lamps only work if there is oil in them. The more oil, the longer the lamps will burn.

Along with that if you divide up the oil among many lamps and the light will not shine long enough. The wise virgins are not being selfish. They are intent on providing light long enough for the occasion. They have their oil and they are intent on using it wisely.

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### **...Tell Us Something Important about the Spiritual Life**

If we apply that reality to the spiritual life, oil can become a symbol for the fact that one cannot develop spiritually from the experience of someone else. Everyone has to supply oil from their own living out of the teachings of Christ. To have the witness of a grandmother who devoted her life to God, for example, will only benefit us if we try to do as she had done and mature in our own individuality into a new person in Christ.

### **We Have to Bring Our Own “Oil”**

The foolish do not know the way of that. They only know the way of “going and buying,” looking outside themselves for what they need. We encountered this sort of attitude in the story in Mark’s Gospel about the multiplication of loaves. When the disciples tell Jesus to send the crowds away so they can “go ... and buy food for themselves,” Jesus tells the disciples to provide the food. They are flabbergasted: “Are we to go and buy...?”

But Jesus is directing them to their own inner resources, while they are looking outside themselves. In the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well Jesus feeds her from his own inner resources. He also explains to the disciples that he has food of which they do not know. She is fed by the encounter, but so is he. Life in the Spirit nourishes all involved.

The ones who enter the wedding feast with the Bridegroom are the ones who have been attending to the task

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of gaining the oil of readiness by being attentive to the working of the Holy Spirit who gradually draws them into deeper identification with Christ.

### **Paying Attention to the Workings of the Holy Spirit is Ours to Do**

Being attentive to the working of the Holy Spirit is not something we can get someone else to do for us. We have to be practicing that craft ourselves.

It is true that, in the practice of the faith, we can use tools common to the faith journeys of others: prayer practices, engaging in common works of mercy, sharing faith with others by talking about it and comparing notes.

But there is undoubtedly a unique way that we will put that all together, in a way that is tailor-made to us. The Holy Spirit is active in that task.

### **God is Closer to Us than We are to Ourselves**

Worshiping God from afar is inappropriate. We must receive Christ into ourselves as a person would receive bread, putting it into our mouth, and swallowing it.

With the Holy Spirit of Christ within you, building you up from the inside, and transforming you into that unique Child of God that God had in mind from the beginning we discover the wisdom of our own deepest reality

Only when we commit ourselves to that very intimate form of discipleship, one that cannot be borrowed from

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someone else's form, someone else's divine childhood, will the door open for us and we will enter the wedding feast.

### **A Chance to Take Stock—What Am I Doing?**

What are you doing to integrate the Holy Spirit's action in your life? How are you putting it all together?

Just as every wedding bears the marks of the couple being married, even if they have “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,” our Christian lives are our own, too. We are the ones responsible for them. If we work at them, they will shine. If we don't and fool ourselves into thinking that we can ride the coattails of someone else's spirituality, the lamp will go out, and there will be darkness.