

Wisdom's Light

*This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly.
This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ.
May he/she walk always as a child of the light.
May the flame of faith be kept alive.
When the Lord comes, may he/she go out to meet him
with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.*

These are part of the concluding words of the Baptism liturgy. They are proclaimed by the priest as he hands a lighted candle to the parents and godparents.

It is a prayer that connects all us. It was prayed at our Baptism. And, it goes to the heart of this Sunday's gospel (Matthew 25: 1-13).

In Jesus' time when a couple was engaged ("betrothed") to be married, they lived apart with their respective families until the wedding day.

On the appointed day, usually in the evening, the bridegroom and his family would go to the bride's house. There, escorted by family and guests, carrying lighted torches, the whole crowd would gather for the wedding banquet.

In the parable, Christ is the "bridegroom." The bridesmaids represent us, the church. We were joined ("betrothed") to Christ on the day of our baptism. At the end of our lives, the Bridegroom will come to welcome to the banquet of

eternal life. In the meantime, we are called to allow our faith to "burn brightly" with the good works of faith.

The story doesn't come without a twist, however: We're told that some of the torches went out. The light of faith had been extinguished. Then, some of the bridesmaids went looking for something that can be neither bought nor borrowed.

A doctor once told me: "There are things that I *can* do for you. There are things I *cannot* do for you. I can show you how to care for your health. I *cannot* force you to do it.

We can encourage and support one another in our faith.

We cannot force another to keep that flame of faith alive.

I cannot "borrow" someone else's perseverance. You can't order and "buy" fidelity to the gospel from Amazon.

One cannot compel another to even want to be joined to Christ, the Bridegroom, beyond the door of eternity.

There are things we *can* do. There are things we *cannot* do, even for those we love. That's the inconvenient truth of the gospel's "twist."

I once accompanied a 104 year old woman during her final hours of life here on earth. She had devoted much of her life as an astronomer, studying the stars. She spent an even greater part of her life as a spouse, a mother and great grandmother.

Before dying, she gave the same wise advice to each of her 37 descendants: *Never underestimate the power of a good example. You will impart much light.*

The poetry of the moment was not lost: A woman who studied the celestial light of stars was teaching her kids to be "light" here on earth.

In that moment, as she awaited her eternal Bridegroom, she found exactly what she *could* do.

Pray that until that day when we stand at the doorway to eternity, that we will impart much light---

and find peace in knowing what we can and cannot do.

Fr. Steven Labaire