

WEEK ONE *What are you doing with your faith?*

SCREEN: wedding rings image

Last month I celebrated a wedding at St. Pius.
The couple started planning more than a year ago.
Then the pandemic hit.
Everything had to be rethought,
like the size of their guest list and how to keep everyone safe.
Circumstances forced them to adapt, and they adapted.
They met all the challenges head on and prepared for whatever may come.
I feared that their wedding would be less joyful, but I was wrong.
When it came to getting married, they knew that
wearing masks and social distancing weren't the end of the world.
What was most important was their love for each other
and being one with God.
And when the big day arrived,
their love lit up the church and filled everyone with joy.

SCREEN: It's The End of The World main screen

Today we're beginning a new message series titled:
"It's the End of the World as We Know it...and I feel fine."
Now, if you're a fan of rock music you know this is
the title of a hit song by the band R.E.M. - it came out in 1987.
The title can sound scary, but that's not the intention.
In this three week series we will hear the message that
no matter what is going on in the world or our lives,
we can feel fine because God is with us.
God has a plan for this world and the next.
Since the day that Jesus rose from the dead,
humanity has been living in the end times.
And with the pandemic, racial injustice and the election,
'the end times' sounds like the perfect description for 2020.
Our church year is also coming to an end -

Advent begins in three weeks.

In the parables of this series,

Jesus reminds us that his Kingdom is coming.

Today he told us that heaven is like a wedding feast,
and we're all invited.

The best way to RSVP is to put our faith into action every day.

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So now, let's turn to the Gospel story we heard.

Some background on weddings in ancient times
will help you to really understand this parable.

In Jesus's day wedding feasts often lasted for an entire week.

The celebration would begin on the evening of the first day,
when the bridegroom would go to the home of his
bride-to-be to collect her.

The job of the bridesmaids - also called virgins -
was to be on the lookout for the groom's arrival.

They didn't have clocks or watches so they had to keep constant watch.

As soon as they saw him coming they'd go out in the dark with lamps to welcome him.

In Jesus's story the groom was so late in coming
that the virgins had to fight off drowsiness.

They also had to make sure that their lamps, which were filled with oil,
didn't go out while they waited.

Jesus said that five of them were wise - they brought along extra oil
to keep their lamps burning bright.

But five were foolish - they brought no extra oil.

Their only option was to go and buy more oil, which they did.

But then they missed the groom's arrival
and got locked out of the wedding feast.

Now, if you're like me, you might ask,

"Why didn't the wise virgins just share some of their oil?"

Were they being selfish or mean?

And the answer is no.

Remember, this is a parable, which Jesus used to teach his followers about the Kingdom of God.

He's the bridegroom in the story.

His arrival is the Second Coming.

The virgins represent the Church waiting for his return and the oil in the lamps represents faith.

To be prepared to welcome Christ when he returns, every individual needs to have their own supply of faith.

Faith is not like lamp oil that can be borrowed from someone.

Every individual is responsible for keeping their faith alive - to keep it burning brightly for all to see.

The challenge disciples face is to not grow weary or drowsy and to not get distracted by other things.

Because if we do, we can end up like the foolish virgins in the story - unprepared when Christ comes and locked out of the Kingdom.

On the day you and I were baptized,

Christ filled our souls with his light - gave us the gift of faith.

On that day, Christ - in a sense - proposed to us.

Said, *'I want to be with you:*

for better for worse, for richer for poorer,

in sickness and in health, for all eternity.'

That's how much Jesus loves us.

Our lives are founded on a covenant of love.

But God also gives us the gift of free will.

We have to say 'yes' to Christ's proposal, not just once, but every day.

If we want to be happy and content in this world and the next, we must stay connected to Christ.

Which means being like the wise virgins in the Gospel today - remaining vigilant and not being distracted by other things

which could cause us to miss out on the Lord's presence.

We can easily get distracted by possessions or money or pleasure, by our careers or our education or our relationships - making them the most important thing in life.

And as necessary as these things are, and as great as they can be, at the end of the day, they all pale in comparison to what Christ offers when we center our lives on him alone.

So, let me get practical about how we can prepare every day.

First, if everything happening right now has you questioning what your life is about or where you're headed, be sure to look for answers in the right places.

Back in June I signed up to be part of an email forum called NextDoor.

It connects me with people in my neighborhood who might have questions like where to find a good plumber or electrician or dog sitter.]

It can be really helpful - there are others who have the answers we seek.

But when it comes to deeper questions about life or faith, you and I need to be very selective.

Don't seek wisdom from someone you know is unreliable, untrustworthy or foolish - they can't help you.

Though I guarantee they are more than willing to offer you plenty of unsolicited advice.

SCREEN: turn to God

Instead, as a disciple, always begin by turning to God in prayer.

You hear me say this in nearly every message series, but prayer is so essential for disciples.

God who created you knows you better than you know yourself.

God knows your struggles, your hurts and every challenge you face.

God sees you when you're life has been better *and* worse, in good times *and* bad.

God also knows what will bring you the most joy in life.

So pour out your problem or dilemma to the one who loves you unconditionally and can show you the way forward.

Turn to God first when you need wise counsel.

SCREEN: turn to others

Second, know that God will often answer your prayers through other people.

So seek a spiritually, wise person in your life.

It could be a family member or friend, a teacher or coach, a pastor or small group member.

A wise disciple will help you keep your lamp of faith burning bright because they have your best interests at heart.

He or she will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear.

So seek out a wise disciple and take their advice.

And finally, prepare for Jesus's coming by putting your faith into practice every day.

And here's a great opportunity.

SCREEN: Families-Helping-Families announcement screen

Our Thanksgiving mission project called, Families-Helping-Families, has begun.

Your generosity can help feed those who otherwise would go without at Thanksgiving.

Our program supports St. Joseph's Church in Largo, MD, the Pope Francis Outreach Center at Assumption Church in DC, and the Bowie Interfaith Food Pantry.

Families-Helping-Families looks different this year due to the pandemic.

The organizations have asked that we only provide turkeys and financial support.

Our program coordinators will purchase the turkeys with the funds you give and any size donation is welcome.

You can write a check or donate through Faith Direct, which is our online giving platform.

Check out the bulletin or website for all the details.

(or you can click on the link in the chat feature right now).

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Everyday, Jesus invites us into the arms of his loving embrace.

Let us profess our love for him by recommitting to our faith,
that we may dispel the darkness of our world. Amen. +