

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

A Sunday school teacher was testing the children in her class one morning to see if they understood the concept of “getting to Heaven.” She said, “If I sold my house and my car, held a big garage sale and gave all my money to the Church, would that get me into Heaven?” “NO!” the children answered. “If I cleaned the Church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?” Again, the answer was, “NO!” “Well, then, if I was kind to animals, gave candy to children and loved my husband, would that get me into Heaven?” Again, they all answered, “NO!” “Well,” the teacher continued, “how do I get into Heaven?” A five-year-old boy shouted out, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD.”

The liturgy of the word of God today speaks about being alert, prepared, vigilant to receive the Kingdom of Heaven. The first reading of today speaks of wisdom, a wisdom which regulates not only this life but the next also. Wisdom is a Divine gift – but a gift that will not elude the one who seeks it sincerely. Wisdom makes people prudent, vigil and make right choice in life. It is found by those who look for her because ‘she is sitting at your gates’. The Lord is always near to us when we seek him. In the second reading, St. Paul says that we need to be alert, well prepared and vigilant that we may not grieve and lose hope in the second coming of Jesus. Only the alert and the vigilant can experience God coming in their lives. Those who are asleep to the present never seem to notice God’s Presence. In the Gospel Jesus speaks of the parable of the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish virgins to teach us about the need to be spiritually prepared for His coming. Five of the virgins were wise because they brought enough oil with them for their lamps and they were alert to meet the bridegroom and enter the wedding feast. The other five virgins were foolish because they did not bring enough for their lamps and were not prepared and so they did not enter the wedding feast.

The virgins represent the Church or Christian community that is waiting for Christ’s Second Coming. The Bridegroom is Christ. The wedding feast is the great and joyous occasion in which Christ comes for his Church (Rev 19:9). The delay of the Bridegroom corresponds to the delay of the Second Coming or Parousia. The Bridegroom’s arrival in the dark of night is the Second Coming itself. The closing of the door is the final judgment. The parable teaches us that, like the five wise virgins, we should attend to duties of the present moment, preparing now, rather than waiting until it is too late. We need to be ever prepared by carefully making our daily choices for God and put the commandment of love into practice by showing kindness, mercy and forgiveness. We need to make sure that we have enough oil. We must be filled with the spiritual fuel, oil of faith and prayer, compassion and mercy, oil of patience, sympathy, and forgiveness. We need to plan, before it’s too late. Spiritual readiness, preparation and growth do not just happen. It is not something that one can attain overnight or borrow from someone else as the foolish virgins attempted to do. They come as a result of intentional habits built into one’s life. It was not raining when Noah built the ark! The Lord is coming. We don’t know where or when, but we need to get ready for him. A lamp without oil is like faith without good works - dead and useless. “Therefore, stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.” Amen.