

Homily Notes for Sunday, November 8, 2020, 32nd in Ordinary Time

Wis 6:12-16; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13

1. Summary: Wisdom and Prudence are central in our readings today. Wisdom is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues. These two important subjects are key to living the stewardship way of life in our complex world. As Christian stewards, we should rely on these gifts and ask the Holy Spirit to increase them within us.

Scripture lessons:

2. The first reading: Jesus' parable in today's Gospel shows us five well-prepared, wise women, and the first reading chosen for today offers us Wisdom, personified as a woman. Writing in Greek to the dispersed Jews living in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, in Egypt, around 100 BC, the author wants his fellow Jews to seek wisdom and learn from it. Wisdom is a Divine gift – but a gift that will not elude the one who seeks it sincerely. It instructs:

“Taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence (is perfect understanding), and whoever for her [that is, wisdom's] sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care.”

How does the seeking of wisdom — not worldly wisdom, but the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit — “free us from care”? It causes us to rely on God to lead and guide us. This is indeed a freeing way to approach life, removing the pressure from us to have all the answers — because the truth is, we don't. The world is too complicated and unpredictable. This is the beauty of “Christian” wisdom. The Christian steward can rest in the power of the Holy Spirit to help us navigate any situation. How can we best obtain this “wisdom?”

3. Faithfulness in a hostile environment. What the author suggests is that the faithful adherence of the Alexandrian Jews to their ancestral religion in their somewhat hostile environment is seeking after Divine wisdom. It is guiding faithful Jews who were living in the midst of a corrupt Greek culture to follow closely all the spiritual and moral teachings of their God. Their situation was very similar to ours today where we live in a culture increasingly corrupt and hostile to God and his values.

4. The second reading: No situation is more complex (or painful) than death, a subject that St. Paul takes on in our Second Reading from his letter to the Thessalonians. Paul teaches us to be wise in our attitude towards death — our own and that of our loved ones. He advises that we not be “*unaware... about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep.*” This is both comforting and sobering. It reminds us that death does not have the final word, because Jesus has conquered even death. We are **wise stewards** if we live our lives with this truth in mind, always being ready to face our judgment day.

The central idea is clear: only the alert and the vigilant can experience God coming in their lives. Those who are asleep to the present will never be ready when God calls them to himself.

5. Today's Gospel passage. Jesus makes this point very explicitly in our Gospel passage from Matthew. He tells the parable of ten virgins awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom who will welcome them into the wedding feast. Five of the virgins were foolish and five were wise. The foolish virgins failed to bring oil along with their lamps when they went to meet the bridegroom. The wise ones, however, **had prepared** and brought sufficient oil to keep their lamps lit when the bridegroom came. The foolish virgins, caught off guard, ran off to buy more oil, but they were too late. The door to the wedding feast was locked to them. Jesus cautions, “Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” The “prudent” person is always “prepared”.

6. The meaning of the parable: This parable has both a local and a universal meaning.

a. The local meaning is that the foolish virgins represent the “Chosen People of God” who were waiting for the Messiah but were shut out from the messianic banquet because they were unprepared. “The division between the wise and the foolish virgins becomes the division between those in Matthew's church who keep the commandments of Christ and those who hear his words but fail to do what he commands.”

b. The universal meaning is that the five foolish virgins represent those of us who fail to prepare for the end of our lives. What matters is not the occasional or the last-minute burst of spiritual fervor but **habitual** attention to responsibilities before God. At the final judgment, there will be no depending upon the resources of others, no

begging or borrowing of grace. The parable guides us to be prudent, having our lives always in order rather than waiting until it is too late.

7. What is Wisdom and what is Prudence? “For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence.”

8. Wisdom is a spiritual gift (Isa 11:2) that enables one to know the purpose and plan of God. It is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is much more than lots of information or data. *Wisdom implies superior judgment and understanding based on broad knowledge (CCC 1831).*

9. Prudence is the virtue which disposes a person to discern the good and choose the correct means to accomplish it. It is one of the cardinal moral virtues and provides the proximate guidance for the judgment of the conscience (CCC 1806). *Prudent suggests the wisdom of one who is able to discern the most suitable course of action in practical matters.* Prudence perfects the intelligence, which is the power of forming judgments. Knowledge and experience are important for prudence. Are you prepared with the wisdom of life that will enable you to discern the most God-pleasing response to every decision of life? What would help us to be prepared?

10. A modern example of wisdom and prudence (or foolish error). Texting while driving. A relative of mine was driving behind her husband in her car going home when he suddenly saw in his rear-view mirror her drive off the road and roll the car. She was almost killed. What happened? She was texting and lost control of the car.

Another essential area of Christian wisdom is the idea of “transgender” identity. As Christians we know that God created us as male and female, men and women, with the purpose of reproducing and forming a stable family for the sake of raising the children and caring for each other. It is not “wisdom” to believe that one can make up one’s gender. It is given and if not respected leads to disfunction and the collapse of a culture.

11. How can we know that some action or some knowledge is wise and prudent? Could it be when we feel “good” and “at peace” about it? Not at all. Let us be careful about “feelings.” The Catechism refers to “emotions” under the title of “the Passions” (See CCC 1763).

“The term ‘passions’ refers to emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil.” “In themselves passions are neither good nor evil... Strong feelings are not decisive for the morality or holiness of persons; they are simply the inexhaustible reservoir of images and affections in which the moral life is expressed” (CCC 1768).

We are more surely guided by St Paul in Romans: 12:2:

“Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Fundamental to our understanding of the human person is that “reason” is the highest of our faculties and that we should always seek to be reasonable from God’s point of view. This is an essential part of being good stewards. A good steward will always take care for correct formation of his ideas.

12. Correct formation of conscience. We should be directed by a correctly formed conscience rather than our feelings. Hence, we must know rationally what is good and bad, right and wrong from the point of view of God in order to have wisdom. Feelings can confirm or mislead. Our conscience needs to be formed and guided by the truths of Sacred Scripture and Tradition as interpreted by the Church.

14. The stewardship way of life — with its daily and weekly commitments to giving God the best of our Time, Talents and Treasure — **is the “oil” that we keep with us at all times.** Hence, we understand that the readings for every Mass are preparing us for the end of our lives, that we might be ready, like the five wise virgins, having our lives (lamps) ready for our personal salvation. There will be not time to get ready when he comes.

Problem: Elena has contracted marriage with a very wealthy non-Catholic and has two children. Before her marriage she was a devout Catholic but now she has given up many of her previous religious practices, though she still claims to be a good Catholic. She will not have a crucifix on the wall of any of the rooms in her house, because she asserts that the representation of the cruel sufferings inflicted on Our Lord will have a terrifying and depressing effect on the minds of her children. What do you think of her argument against the presence of a crucifix in her home?