

32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

Wisdom 6:12-16 + Psalm 63: 2-8 + 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 + Matthew 25: 1-13
November 6, 2011

The month of November begins with the celebration of All Saints Day and All Souls Day, directing our attention to our connection with those who have died and reminding us that there is more to life than life on this earth. All Saints Day and All Souls Day cause us to think about our own death as well, to ponder our destiny.

Each year during the month of November the Church focuses our attention on the “Last Things”: death, judgment, heaven and hell. As the days grow shorter, as darkness lengthens and light lessens, the Church encourages us to ponder the shortness of our life. As yet another liturgical year comes to an end during November, the Church presents us with parables of the “end-time” that challenge us to live our faith more fully in the present time.

As we finish up the “Year of Matthew” over the next three Sundays, we are challenged by three end-time parables from the 25th Chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. In this section of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is preaching near the end of his own life from the mount of Jerusalem, challenging his listeners to be prepared for the end, which no one can avoid.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the judgment of nations, stir us from slumber, shake us from sleep, awaken us to the harsh truth of the shortness of our lives and the need to live fully today what we profess to believe. Every one of us will have to give an account of ourselves before God, an account of how we have developed and shared the gifts of time and talent and treasure, how we have lived the life given to us.

We do not want to come to the end of our life and be “left outside” the locked door to heaven, with the Lord saying those chilling words, “I do not know you.”

At first glance and upon an initial hearing, there is something deeply disturbing about the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The 5 virgins who come prepared for the long vigil will not share their oil with their needy sisters.

Instead, they send them off on a foolhardy mission at midnight to go buy their own oil. How can such seemingly selfish hoarding be laudable, be praised by Jesus? After all, the wise virgins appear to be looking out for themselves rather than sharing with those in need.

Many biblical commentators explain that parables are meant to make only one point, and selfishness versus sharing is not the point of this parable.

Remember, it is a parable about the end time.

Since it is a parable about the end time, this parable of the wise and foolish virgins reveals how each person needs to be accountable for his or her own good deeds, or lack of them, at the time of judgment.

Just as in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says,

“Let your light shine before others so they may see your good works and give glory to God” (Mt. 5:16),

so in today’s Gospel the oil that fuels the light is also to be understood as good deeds, and no one can share their good deeds with someone who has none.

The truth of oil—you have to have your own---each person must personally appropriate the teachings of Jesus and live them out---no one else can do that for you.

The truth of the oil of the wise virgins---they have been sharing with those in need all their lives and filling the lamp of their life with these drops of love in order to see the Lord at the end time and be seen by him.

The oil is all that we do to nurture our relationship with the Lord, personally and in our relationships with others.

This parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Chapter 25

is part of the 5th and final great discourse of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel,

and it connects to his 1st great discourse, the Sermon on the Mount in Chapters 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount of Jerusalem at the end of Jesus’ ministry continues to flesh out the Sermon on the Mt. of Beatitudes that Jesus gave at the beginning of his ministry.

For the wise virgins are like the wise man who hears the words of Jesus and acts on them, building his house on rock, while the foolish virgins are like the foolish man who hears the words of the Lord but refuses to act on them, building his house on sand.

That little parable at the end of Chapter 7 concluded the Sermon on the Mount, emphasizing the importance of putting Jesus’ teachings into practice.

Those who put into practice what Jesus teaches, Jesus will know at the end of time.

The way of wisdom is listening and acting on the words of the Lord Jesus.

What are the words of wisdom that Jesus in Matthew's Gospel preaches from the mountaintop in his famous Sermon on the Mount that we are challenged to put into practice?

Words about the danger of anger and the healing power of reconciliation, words about trusting God to provide the necessities of life instead of being enslaved to money, and very challenging words about loving one's enemy, praying for one's persecutors.

So, we who want the Bridegroom to know us when he returns in glory, we who want to be welcomed to the never-ending party of God's love and life, need to wake up and examine how our actions match the words of the Master Teacher.

Is anger leading us to murder the reputation of another by spreading rumors?

Is anger causing us a slow, painful death of the heart?

Do we need to reconcile with a brother or sister who we have nurtured anger against or who might be angry with us?

Because of love of money are we living a life of slavery, unable to experience true freedom as a child of God trusting in the Father's providential love?

How does our life today reflect our trust that God will provide for our basic needs?

What does it really mean to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us?

The challenge to put Jesus' teachings into action is not just about living out his teaching from the Mt. of the Beatitudes

but also from the Mt. of Jerusalem in this 25th chapter of Matthew.

Are we tending and increasing the gifts God has given us and sharing them joyfully?

Or are we full of fear, burying the gifts of God, not using them at all?

Do we recognize the King of the Universe in the least of our brothers and sisters and serve him there?

Or do we turn a blind eye to those who are hungry or sick or in prison, refusing to serve Christ in the least of our brothers and sisters?

Our daily choices for living justly prepare us for the critical moment of meeting our Beloved face to face at the end of our life.

Every time we resist hoarding oil for ourselves and share it with others we allow Christ's light to shine through us.

Every time we resist the temptation of greed to stockpile what we have, to hold onto it tightly, and instead share it generously and freely, we allow Christ's light to fill us and spread to others.

There is love, like a small lamp, fed by oil, that goes out when the oil is ended;
or like a rain-fed stream which goes dry when rain no longer feeds it.
But there is love, like a spring gushing from the earth, never to be exhausted.
Those who are wise become one with the inexhaustible river of Christ's love,
their oil is continuously replenished as it is consumed.

They receive Christ into themselves as one would receive bread.
They open themselves to Christ and allow Christ to change them from the inside out.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi