

November 12, 2017
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 25:1-13



[Jesus told his disciples this parable:] "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, 4 but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' 10 While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. 11 Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' 12 But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Background

The parable of the ten virgins is told with an understanding of the typical wedding of the day in mind. At the time when this parable was being told by Jesus, and retold by the early Christians, and finally recorded as part of the gospels, a wedding usually unfolded in stages. The marriage was arranged by the families, often while the children were still young. With the betrothal, the couple was technically married, but each continued to live with their own families. When all the financial matters were worked out between the two families, the groom then went to take the bride into his home, to consummate the wedding and for them to begin to live as husband and wife. This is when the celebration began. The virgins in the gospel were most likely part of the bridal procession, waiting for the arrival of the groom and standing as witnesses to the consummation of the marriage.

The wedding banquet in the parable is being used as a symbol that God is preparing for the faithful at the end of time. Jesus himself uses the wedding banquet as a symbol of the end time fulfillment. (Matthew 22:1-2, this was the gospel text for October 9.) Another symbol is the fact that they are waiting in darkness, without knowing when their vigil will be ended. Lastly, the separation that occurs between the faithful and foolish bridesmaids can be permanent.

The parable stresses the point that it is their preparedness that separates the wise from the foolish. Both the wise and the foolish have been invited to keep vigil, both have brought their lamps, both have fallen asleep. The only thing that separates them is the fact that the wise have made adequate preparations. When you take note that the wise did not give of their surplus oil to the foolish, this suggests that whatever it is that one must do to be prepared for the coming is not something that one person can do for another. Everyone must make his or her own preparations.

Reflection Questions

1. What did you do to prepare for the last wedding that you attended?
2. The parable begins by stating "the kingdom of heaven will be like..." When the parable begins this way, do you understand it to be more about the reign of God after Jesus' return at the end of time, or the reign of God that began with Jesus' conception as the infant to be born of Mary?

3. In the parable, all the virgins are said to have fallen asleep. How do you relate to that part of this parable?
4. When you think about times in your life when you have been awake to God's presence in your life, can you identify things that have helped you to be awake to God's presence?
5. In a similar way, have there been times when you were asleep to the presence of God in your life, and can you identify things within you that have contributed to that lack of awareness?
6. Do you ever think God might be trying to come into your life in ways or places that you are not expecting?
7. Can you take some time and talk to God about the unexpected arrival of the bridegroom, or the virgins falling asleep, or some other aspect of the parable that arises within you as you hear this parable?

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The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.

They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

