

# Homily for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Times

November 11-12, 2017

Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13

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Who doesn't like going to a wedding? It is a joyous occasion where two people profess their love to each other. It is celebrated with the best food and wine a family is able to provide. That same enthusiasm existed two millennia ago when Jesus walked the earth. Then, weddings could even last for a week! Everyone in the village and surrounding area was included. They didn't want to be left out!

In the parable, Jesus shares a custom of young maidens waiting with torches for the bridegroom as he returns from the bride's home. This image of a bridegroom was familiar to the disciples as it had been used by the prophets, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea. It was an image of God coming for the people of Israel, the bride whom God cherished and loved.

The disciples would also have understood the image of the bridegroom shifting to represent Jesus and the love he has for his people because Jesus had previously compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a wedding feast. John, in the Book of Revelation, continues this image of a banquet for us and calls it, the marriage Feast of the Lamb. If going to heaven is like a wedding reception, we surely don't want to be left out! But how do people get left out? Why were the young maidens left out when they went to find more oil and missing when the bridegroom arrived?

This passage appears in a long discourse of Jesus near the end of Matthew's gospel. Prior to his impending death, Jesus shares the things that will transpire at the end of time. Through a series of parables, Jesus directs us to pay attention and take action. In this parable, the wise maidens brought extra oil along with their torches, just in case the bridegroom was late. They didn't know the hour of his return nor do we know when Jesus, our bridegroom, will return at the end of time. It may be too late for us, too, if we don't plan ahead. That is precisely what happened to the foolish maidens who ran out of oil and were absent for the bridegroom's return. This light from the torch is a wonderful metaphor for us.

The maidens' simple gesture of providing light represents their respect for and dedication to the bridegroom. If the Bridegroom is now Jesus, what does he desire from us? The answer comes later in this same chapter, "Come...inherit the kingdom prepared for you; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." This is what Jesus calls us to do.

We are fooling ourselves if we think our decisions don't matter. Our every decision makes a difference in our world and dictates our destiny. The consequence of not listening to Jesus is represented by the misfortune of the foolish maidens. They were oblivious, unprepared and turned away from the banquet by the bridegroom saying he does not even recognize them! What would that be like for us? Not only being closed out of the best party ever, *but* having to spend time with selfish, lazy and annoying people who drive all of us crazy! As we

approach the end of the liturgical year, remember, we all have a choice and there is much to do.

Jesus refers to us as the light of the world after the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, a light within us shines when we engage in deeds of kindness and compassion. Being present to those less fortunate or marginalized allows our light to shine brighter. That is the light of those torches. The oil of the wise maidens could not be shared as it was a part of who they were. That light doesn't flip on like a light switch. It takes time. Nobody can do it for us. We have to make the decision and commit to these teachings of Jesus. When we follow Jesus, the Christ, our light will shine and we will not be left out!