

Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 7-8, 2020

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

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How many of us are looking forward to the end of this pandemic? To returning to some semblance of normalcy? And it's taking too long, isn't it? Many of us have pandemic fatigue. Tempted to let our guard down. We weren't prepared to wait this long, were we?

Matthew's community could identify with that! They did not expect Jesus' Second Coming to take so long. The wait was a struggle. Matthew uses a series of parables to encourage his community—and us—to stay alert. To be prepared. Ready to meet the Lord when he comes. In today's gospel, all ten virgins were prepared to meet the bridegroom, but only five were prepared for his being delayed.

Being prepared was a value my mother instilled in us, long before I really understood what she meant. “Always travel with your bags packed,” she would say, “because you never know the day or the hour.”

Being ready is the message of this gospel. Like many of the readings at the end of our liturgical year. But being prepared, being ready, requires wisdom, doesn't it? In his recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis says true wisdom demands an encounter with reality. It is not born of quick searches on the Internet, he says. Nor by creating a virtual bubble, excluding people or situations we find disagreeable. Such actions block the kind of serene reflection that could lead to true wisdom.

An encounter with reality these days can be sobering, though, can't it? It is an understatement to say we have just experienced the most tumultuous election of our lifetime. Some close races may not be decided for days or weeks. Causing uncertainty and anxiety. Frustration. Perhaps even anger.

And experts tell us the fallout from the pandemic will be with us for some time. That full economic recovery could be slow. Poverty and income inequality abound. Unheeded climate change threatens our future. Sobering realities indeed!

Our beautiful reading from the Book of Wisdom offers us hope. Assures us that wisdom is available to those who love her. Found by those who seek her. "One who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care." That speaks volumes about our ability to trust, doesn't it?

We yearn for help, as the psalmist cries out. "My soul thirsts for you, O Lord, my God...my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." But, Ah! God's "steadfast love is better than life." We can continue to draw deeply from that boundless well of God's love. And choose to be available to the wisdom God offers.

Pope Francis reminds us that the pandemic crisis has enabled us to recognize and appreciate those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded valiantly by putting their lives on the line for the rest of us. "We began to realize that our lives are interwoven and sustained by ordinary people...men and women working to provide essential services and public safety...." We are, after all, brothers and sisters. All members of God's family. As one theologian says, we are all held in the womb of God.

Could it be that God is using our current adversities to create a new normal? That God is laboring to give birth, through us, to a new humanity, a new creation? Are we ready to welcome the Lord in this new way?

Fr. Thomas Keating, a recognized spiritual writer, suggests that we should begin a new world with one that actually exists. "This will allow and offer the world the marvelous gift of beginning, [of] creating, of trusting each other, of forgiving each other, and of showing compassion, care for the poor, and putting all our trust in the God of heaven and earth."

Sunday's opening prayer begins "Graciously keep us from all adversity..." We ask freedom from adversity, not for its own sake, but so that "we may pursue the things that are yours." Jesus taught us what that involves: healing, forgiveness, nonviolence, kindness, generosity to those in need, welcoming strangers, and much more.

Be ready to meet the Lord, not only in the Second Coming, but in one another. Ready to cooperate with God's grace, to midwife a new normal. Trust in God, drawing on the wisdom and love God offers. Be ready. Act wisely. These are the challenges of today's readings.

How we choose to respond has repercussions for our brothers and sisters and for our planet.