

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: ‘The kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, “The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him.” At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, “Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out.” But they replied, “There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves.” They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other bridesmaids arrived later. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us.” But he replied, “I tell you solemnly, I do not know you.” So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.’

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday, the Gospel indicates the condition that would allow us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and it does so with the parable of the 10 virgins: it is about those maiden brides who were designated to welcome and accompany the bridegroom to the wedding ceremony and, since at that time it was customary to celebrate the ceremony at night, the maiden brides were provided with lamps. The parable states that five of these maidens are wise and five are foolish: indeed, the wise ones have brought oil for their lamps, while the foolish have brought none. The bridegroom’s arrival is delayed and they all fall asleep. At midnight the bridegroom’s arrival is announced; at that moment the foolish maidens realize they have no oil for their lamps, and they ask the wise ones

for some. But the latter reply that they cannot give them any because there would not be enough for everyone. Thus, while the foolish maidens go in search of oil, the bridegroom arrives; the wise maidens go in with him to the marriage feast and the door is shut. The five foolish maidens return too late; they knock on the door, but the response is “I do not know you”, and they remain outside.

What does Jesus wish to teach us with this parable? He reminds us that we must be ready for the encounter with him. Many times, in the Gospel, Jesus exhorts keeping watch, and he also does so at the end of this narrative. He says: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”. But with this parable he tells us that keeping watch does not only mean not to sleep, but to be ready; in fact all the maidens are asleep before the bridegroom’s arrival, but upon waking some are ready and others are not. Thus, here is the meaning of being wise and prudent: it is a matter of not waiting until the last minute of our lives to cooperate with the grace of God, but rather to do so as of now. It would be good to consider for a moment: one day will be the last. If it were today, how prepared am I? But I must do this and that.... Be ready as if it were the last day: this does us good.

The lamp is a symbol of the faith that illuminates our life, while the oil is a symbol of the charity that nourishes the light of faith, making it fruitful and credible. The condition for being prepared for the encounter with the Lord is not only faith, but a Christian life abundant with love and charity for our neighbour. If we allow ourselves to be guided by what seems more comfortable, by seeking our own interests, then our life becomes barren, incapable of giving life to others, and we accumulate no reserve of oil for the lamp of our faith; and this — faith — will be extinguished at the moment of the Lord’s coming, or even before. If instead we are watchful and seek to do good, with acts of love, of sharing, of service to a neighbour in difficulty, then we can be at peace while we wait

for the bridegroom to come: the Lord can come at any moment, and even the slumber of death does not frighten us, because we have a reserve of oil, accumulated through everyday good works. Faith inspires charity and charity safeguards faith.

May the Virgin Mary help our faith to be ever more effective through charity; so that our lamp may already shine here, on the earthly journey and then for ever, at the marriage feast in heaven.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In this parable, Jesus instructs us to “stay awake” because we don’t know the day or the hour of the master’s return. In your life, what does it look like for you to live your life of faith “awake”?
- When the bridegroom, Jesus, is approaching, the unprepared bridesmaids beg for those with oil to share what they have. Were they to cooperate, all the bridesmaids would run out of oil. This oil is like the fuel of our faith. How do you keep your fuel tank full?
- Have you ever felt like your fuel tank was low? What did you do? How does a person refill this “fuel”?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.