

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 of them 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 OF POPE FRANCIS*12 November 2023*

Today's Gospel offers us a story regarding the meaning of life of each person. It is the parable of the 10 maidens, called to go out to meet the bridegroom (cf. Mt 25:1-13). Living is this: a great preparation for the day when we will be called to go to Jesus! In the parable however, five of the 10 virgins are wise and five are foolish. Let us see what constitutes wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom in life, and foolishness in life.

All those bridesmaids are there to welcome the bridegroom, that is, they want to meet him, just as we too desire a happy fulfilment of life: the difference between wisdom and foolishness is therefore not in goodwill. Nor does it lie in the punctuality with which they arrive at the meeting: they were all there. The difference between the wise and the foolish is another: preparation. The text says: the wise "took flasks of oil with their lamps" (v. 4); the foolish, on the other hand, did not. This is the difference: the oil. And what is one of the characteristics of the oil? That it cannot be

seen: it is inside the lamps, it is not conspicuous, but without it, the lamps have no light.

Let us look at ourselves, and we will see that our life runs the same risk: many times, we are very careful about our appearance — the important thing is to take good care of one's image and make a good impression in front of others. But Jesus says that the wisdom of life lies elsewhere: in taking care of what cannot be seen but is more important; taking care of the heart. Nurturing an inner life. This means knowing how to stop and listen to one's heart, to keep watch over one's own thoughts and feelings. How often are we unaware of what has happened in our heart on a [given] day? What happens within each one of us? Wisdom means knowing how to make room for silence, in order to be able to listen to ourselves and to others. It means knowing how to give up some of the time spent in front of telephone screens, to look at the light in the eyes of others, in one's own heart, in God's gaze upon us. It means not falling into the trap of activism, but devoting time to the Lord, to listening to his Word.

And the Gospel gives us the right advice so as not to neglect the oil of inner life, the "oil of the soul". It tells us that it is important to prepare it. In fact in the story, we see that the maidens already have the lamps, but they have to prepare the oil: they have to go to the sellers, buy it, put it in the lamps... (cf. vv. 7-9). It is the same for us. An inner life cannot be improvised, it is not a matter of a moment, of once in a while, of once and for all. Inner life has to be prepared by dedicating a little time every day, with constancy, as one does for every important thing.

So, we can ask ourselves: what am I preparing at this moment in life? Within myself, what am I preparing? Perhaps I am trying to put aside some savings, I am thinking about a house or a new car, concrete plans... They are good things; they are not bad things. But am I also thinking about dedicating time to the care of the heart, to prayer, to service to others, to the Lord who is the destination of life? In short, how is the oil of my soul? Each one of us, let us ask ourselves this: how is the oil of my soul? Do I nourish it, do I keep it well?

May Our Lady help us to cherish the oil of inner life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: The wise bridesmaids prepared for the bridegroom long before he arrived. What does Pope Francis suggest is the “oil” that keeps our faith alive?



Heart: Pope Francis warns that we can spend a lot of energy on what others see while neglecting what is happening within. How is the “oil of your soul” at the moment?



Hands: What daily habit could help you care for your inner life this week — prayer, silence, Scripture, service, or something else that draws you closer to the Lord?

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 (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.