

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 BY POPE FRANCIS

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This Sunday’s Gospel passage (Mt 25:1-13) invites us to prolong the reflection on eternal life that we began on the occasion of the Feast of All Saints and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed. Jesus recounts the parable of the ten virgins invited to a wedding feast, symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In Jesus’ time it was customary for weddings to be celebrated at night; so the procession of guests took place with lit lamps. Some of the bridesmaids are foolish: they take their lamps but do not take the oil with them; the wise ones instead take the oil with them together with their lamps. The bridegroom is late, late in coming, and they all fall asleep.

When a voice alerts them that the bridegroom is about to arrive, in that moment, the foolish ones realize that they do not have oil for their lamps; they ask the wise ones for some, but the latter reply that they cannot give away any oil, because there would not be enough for them all. While the foolish maidens go to buy oil, the bridegroom arrives. The wise maidens enter the banquet hall with him, and the door is closed. The others arrive too late and are turned away.

It is clear that with this parable, Jesus wants to tell us that we must be prepared for the encounter with him. Not only for the final encounter, but also for the everyday great and small encounters, with a view to that encounter for which the lamp of faith is not enough; we also need the oil of charity and good works. As the Apostle Paul says, the faith that truly unites us to Jesus is, “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). It is what is represented by the behaviour of the wise maidens. Being wise and prudent means not waiting until the last moment to correspond to God’s grace, but to do so actively and immediately, starting right now. “I... yes, I will convert soon...”. “Convert today! Change your life today!”. “Yes, yes, tomorrow”. And the same thing is said tomorrow, and so it never arrives. Today! If we want to be ready for the final encounter with the Lord, we must cooperate with him now and perform good deeds inspired by his love.

We know that unfortunately it happens that we forget the purpose of our life, that is, the definitive appointment with God, thus losing the sense of expectation and making the present absolute. When one makes the present absolute, one looks only to the present, losing the sense of expectation, which is so beautiful and so necessary, and also pulls us away from the contradictions of the moment. This attitude — when one loses the sense of expectation — precludes any view of the hereafter: we do everything as if we will never depart for the other life.

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And so we care only about possessing, about emerging, about establishing ourselves... And always more. If we allow ourselves to be led by what seems most attractive to us, by what we like, by seeking our interests, our life becomes sterile; we do not accumulate any reserve of oil for our lamp, and it will be extinguished before the encounter with the Lord. We must live today, but a today that goes towards tomorrow, towards that encounter, a present full of hope. If, on the other hand, we are vigilant and correspond to God's grace by doing good, we can serenely await the bridegroom's

coming. The Lord will be able to come even while we are sleeping: this will not worry us, because we have the reserve of oil accumulated through our daily good works, accumulated with that expectation of the Lord, that he may come as soon as possible and that he may come to take us with him.

Let us invoke the intercession of Mary Most Holy, that she may help us to live an active faith, as she did: [faith] is the shining lamp with which we can pass through the night beyond death and reach the great feast of life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: What does it mean to you that the faith that truly unites us to Jesus is, "faith working through love"?



Heart: How do you feel about the idea that some might be locked out of the wedding feast?



Hands: What parts of your life do you feel you might be saying to God, "yes, yes, I'll change it tomorrow"? What could you do today?

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. 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'.