

32nd Sunday in Ord Time - Since Jesus' parable in today's Gospel has five well-prepared, wise women, the first reading chosen for today is one which personifies wisdom as a woman. The author of the Old Testament Book of Wisdom advises Jews in Alexandria not to envy the wisdom of the pagan philosophers, because they themselves have true wisdom in their Sacred Scripture, a wisdom which regulates not only this life but the next also. Hence, they must live their lives in strict conformity with the Divine wisdom given them so generously by God. In the second reading, Paul offers Christian wisdom, assuring those Christians in Thessalonica who expected Jesus' second coming in their lifetime that the death and Resurrection of Jesus is powerful enough to save even those who die before Jesus' second coming. But they need to be alert, well-prepared and vigilant. In the Gospel parable of the ten virgins, the foolish virgins represent the "Chosen People of God" who were waiting for the Messiah but were shut out from the Messianic banquet because they were unprepared. The parable teaches us that, like the five wise virgins, we too should attend to duties of the present moment, preparing now, rather than waiting until it is too late.

We might think it somewhat selfish of the five wise bridesmaids for not sharing their oil, but that really isn't the point of the story. This parable is set within a group of Jesus' teachings about the return of the Son of Man and the final judgement – and of our need to be awake and ready to face that day. The oil is a symbol of the bridesmaids having prepared themselves for His coming. It is a sign of having heard the message of the Gospel and responded by living lives of love and mercy. The emphasis in Matthew's Gospel is that one responds first and foremost by one's deeds, not merely by one's words: "It is not those who say to Me, 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of My Father." And so – we are only genuinely "awake" in faith terms when we put the teachings of Christ into practice in our lives. That is not something that someone else can do for us – Such "oil" cannot be shared or given to others. We can only do it for ourselves.

To put this in an everyday scenario – often at the Parish Office we will get a request from someone to be a Baptismal sponsor. Those of you who have been a sponsor for Baptism or Confirmation know that we ask certain questions to determine if the individual is qualified to be a sponsor, someone who is qualified to teach and pass on the Faith. One of the questions to determine if the person is a practicing Catholic is the frequency of the Sunday Mass attendance. Every now and then we will get the response: "but I was an altar server when I was in school", or "my grandparents went there and my parents still belong to that church". Our question is not so much what you did in the past – which may be very commendable – but rather what you are doing now. Our question is not so much about your parents or grandparents, but about you. When we reach the pearly gates the question will be directed to us. We cannot borrow our parents' or grandparents' loyalty. We cannot ride into Heaven on somebody else's "coattails", but only on what we have accomplished and how faithful and loyal we were up to the last minute.

Kind of like trying to be a coach of a football team because our friend was a coach, but we never touched a football in our life.

For the Christian, the only way of being truly awake is by welcoming Jesus into the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives by serving those who are in need. We are not asked to do extraordinary things. To paraphrase St Teresa of Calcutta: "it's not about doing great things, but about doing ordinary things with great love. That is how we stay awake."

Let us Pray for the Conversion of the World
& for Peace

