

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The time is now. God lives in the present, inviting us to fullness of life. Conversion, commitment and salvation are in the here and now, not in some vague future, or when we get round to it. Compassion is the hallmark of the true follower of Jesus.

God's Spirit of wisdom is alive throughout the world, revealing God's presence to us.

Wisdom 6:12-16

The writer reflects on wisdom, personified as God's agent in the world who shares intimately in God's life and creative purpose.

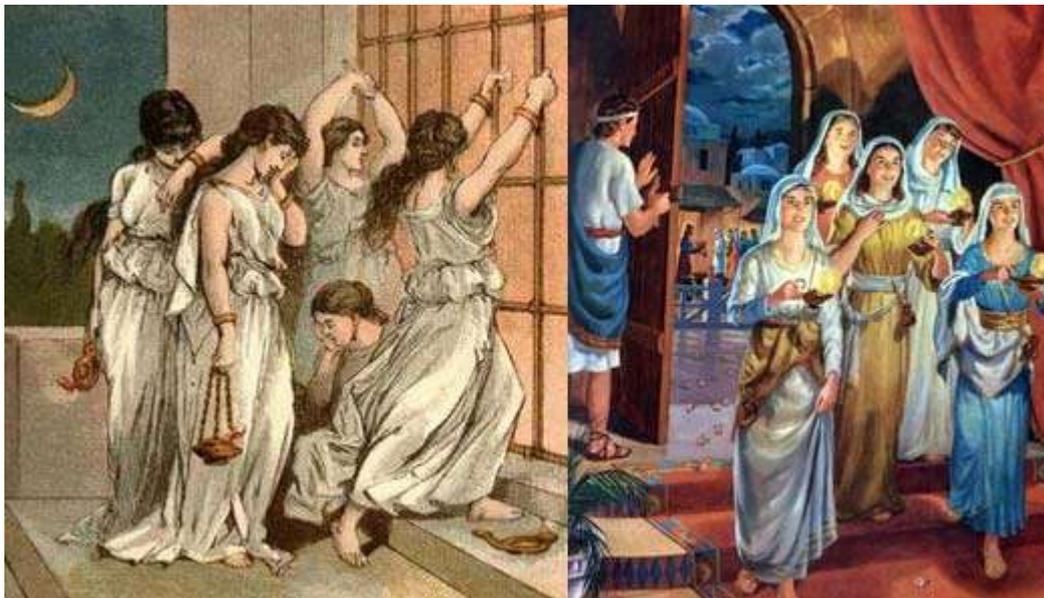
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

God promises us life everlasting as we share in the resurrection of Jesus. We cannot be certain how this will be, but we can be sure that God's promises are to be trusted.

Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids is essentially about having hearts, minds and spirits open and alert to detect the presence of Jesus in our lives.

Reflection



Jesus told his followers a parable about the necessity of being prepared for his final coming. In the story, the Church was depicted as bridesmaids who were

either vigilant and watchful or unprepared and unready for the arrival of the "bridegroom" who was Christ.

At the time of Jesus, the bridesmaids were expected to meet the bridegroom with their oil lamps to lead the wedding party to his home where the wedding feast would be held. The foolish bridesmaids did not expect the bridegroom to arrive late at night, but the wise ones believed that he could arrive at any time. The foolish bridesmaids were caught by surprise and had to go and find oil for their lamps while the rest of the wedding party proceeded to the wedding feast. By the time they arrived, the door had been locked, and they were refused entry. The point of this parable of the bridesmaids is **readiness**. Jesus was continuously telling people to wake up and stay awake.

Obtaining the oil of sanctity was the responsibility of each individual. Nobody can borrow the spiritual wealth that other people have acquired. Jesus said that he would welcome the faithful servants, but those who foolishly left these matters to the last minute would be excluded from the wedding feast in God's kingdom.



The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him.

Our lamps are trimmed and burning,
Our robes are white and clean;
We've tarried for the Bridegroom,
Oh, may we enter in?

Among the early Christians there were certainly “good” disciples and “bad” disciples. But, Matthew in his Gospel is really concerned about the fact that within the Christian community there are serious disciples who behave in a responsible and intelligent manner (“wise” disciples) and there were also “foolish” disciples who behave in a frivolous and careless way.

To explain this, Matthew presents this parable of Jesus: a group of young maidens go out full of joy to wait for the bridegroom and escort him to his wedding celebrations. We’re told, right at the beginning, that some of them are wise and some are foolish. The wise ones take extra oil with them to keep their lamps lit; the foolish ones, on the other hand, don’t give the matter a thought. The bridegroom delays, but arrives at midnight. The wise maidens come out with their lamps to light the way and to accompany the bridegroom, and enter the wedding hall with him. The lamps of the foolish ones, however, have gone out, so they can’t accompany the bridegroom. When they do arrive it is late. The door is closed.

The message is clear: it is foolish to confess faith in Jesus Christ if it doesn’t have an impact in your life. That’s like waiting for Jesus with the light in your lamp gone out. Jesus may delay, but we cannot delay our conversion.

WORDSEARCH

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TEN BRIDESMAID LAMPS

FIVE BRIDEGROOM FOOLISH

SENSIBLE WEDDING OIL

DOOR AWAKE HOUR



“We fed ourselves on dreams of splendour and grandeur,
and ended up consuming distraction, insularity and solitude.

We gorged ourselves on networking
and lost the taste of fraternity.

We looked for quick and safe results,
only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety.

Prisoners of a virtual reality,
we lost the taste and flavour of the truly real.”

Words of Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* 2020.

IDEA FOR LOCKDOWN

What we can learn from St Robert Southwell's 'short pilgrimages'



While he was being hunted down by the Elizabethan authorities during his six years as a missionary priest (1586-1602) St Robert Southwell wrote some great poetry and also some wonderful prose.

In one of his books, ‘A Short Rule of Good Life’, he gave some advice to fit the very difficult circumstances in which Catholics found themselves during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Like us under this pandemic, they were unable to show devotion to the saints; and again, like us, they were forbidden to celebrate Mass publicly. They were being stifled under the terrible Tudor lockdown.

One of St Robert’s suggestions was that the faithful could dedicate each room in the house to a particular saint. The idea was that, when they walked through the door into a room, they would “enter, as it were, into a chapel or church that is devoted to a Saint, and therefore mentally think about, and do reverence to, that saint.”

Taking this idea a bit further, St Robert suggested: ‘Don’t make this exercise (visiting dedicated rooms) a drudgery ’ but “not only in the house, but also in your walks, in your gardens, and in parks do the same: and so make your walk like a short pilgrimage, to visit a shrine.”

You may not be able to go on Pilgrimage at this time, but by dedicating one corner of your garden or the local park to, say,

- (1) St James, another to
- (2) St Peter, a third to
- (3) St Bernadette, and a fourth to
- (4) Our Lady,

you can go on pilgrimage to

- (1) Santiago de Compostela, to
- (2) Rome,
- (3) Lourdes, and
- (4) Walsingham - without travelling hundreds of miles.

In his ‘Short Rule of Good Life,’ St Robert gave lots of practical advice about how to develop this devotion to the saints, ending with these wise words:

“I must take heed that I make not this exercise a toil, but rather a spiritual recreation, and therefore I must not be too eager to do all things on a sudden, but get the habit and custom of it by little and little, for so will it prove an exercise of wonderful profit, easiness, and contentment”.

It may be simpler to watch a livestream from Lourdes or an online Mass from Medjugorje, but true pilgrimages change lives when we take time over them, even if we have to start with a stroll around our back garden.

It’s not a bad day today – so I’m off on Pilgrimage to Compostela
– in West Ham Park!