

TRINITY 27 / THE SUNDAY OF FULFILLMENT

Text: Text: St. Matthew 25:1-13

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

If you wish to know what the Kingdom or Reign of Heaven will be like, listen to the words of JESUS, for He begins His parable with the words, “Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” or in English, “*The Kingdom of Heaven will be like....*”

Thus, the parable of the Ten Virgins is a bit of a misnomer. It really is not about the ten virgins at all. Rather, it is about what we can expect the Kingdom of Heaven and the reign of GOD to be, as well as the consequences of being unprepared for its coming. We are being alerted to the coming reign of GOD at the consummation of the age when CHRIST will return on the clouds of the heavens to be our Judge.

That, beloved Bride of CHRIST, is the point of our LORD’s parable; JESUS will return! He has not left us as orphans. He will return, and though He has been delayed for these many long years for the sake of the ingathering of His elect, we must remain vigilant and ever watchful because we “*know neither the day nor the hour in which the SON OF MAN is coming.*”

In order that we remain ever watchful our LORD places before us this parable.

We have before us ten virgins. Five, our LORD calls “*wise*”, and five He calls “*foolish*”. The word in Greek used to describe the foolish virgins is actually stronger than just “*foolish.*” It is more weighty and implies that the foolish virgins were not simply foolish or imprudent, but morons.

In anticipation of a bridal procession all ten virgins have gone out to meet a certain bridegroom, but there is this important contrast between them; five have brought extra oil for their lamps while the remaining five neglected to do so.

The bridegroom, is seemingly late in arriving and the virgins fall fast asleep only to be awakened by a cry in the middle of the night, “*Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.*” Here is where the contrast between the virgins becomes painfully apparent.

The five wise virgins brought special vessels holding extra oil for their lamps. The foolish virgins failed in this respect. I like to describe their foolishness in contemporary terms. Thus, one might compare their lamps to flashlights. In fact their lamps would have served the same purpose as a modern flashlight allowing them to light their way through the darkened streets and to meet the bridegroom as the bridegroom approached.

We could also compare the extra oil brought by the wise virgins to batteries. The wise virgins knew that they might be in for a long wait and thinking it prudent they brought along extra batteries just in case. This proved to be a wise decision.

The foolish virgins, however, brought only the batteries already in their flashlights. Now, anyone who has ever seen a horror movie, or changed a flat tire on a cold rainy or snowy night, knows what happens to flashlight batteries just when they are needed most—they die. Perhaps that is why St. Matthew, in recording what JESUS said, uses the word “*moron*” in describing the foolish virgins; they knew they should bring along extra batteries but decided against it—a moronic decision.

So again, the virgins who neglected to bring extra oil are not simply imprudent, nor thoughtless or unwise. They knew better and so are far worse. They are morons!

Now, do not blame me for saying so, for these are not my words. They are the words of St. Matthew, and ultimately, they are Words of our LORD which the HOLY SPIRIT has caused to be recorded by Matthew. They *are* strong words because the consequences of not listening to our LORD are indeed disastrous. Either we hear the Word of the LORD, and thus are saved, or we can ignore it to our peril and thus, find the gates of Heaven locked tightly against us. There is no in-between, no limbo, no purgatory. There will be no second chances. Either one will have the oil of faith at our LORD’s reappearing, or one will be left gaping at the gates of Heaven like a moron wondering what happened and how it is that they could possibly be locked so tightly against one.

Now, let us return to my words with which I began this sermon; the parable of the Ten Virgins is a misnomer. It is not about the ten virgins at all. Rather, it is about what we can expect the Kingdom of Heaven and the reign of GOD to be, as well as the consequences of being unprepared for its coming. We are being alerted by JESUS to the coming reign of GOD at the consummation of the age when CHRIST will return on the clouds of the heavens to be our Judge.

JESUS said, “*Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like....*” JESUS is speaking not about the kingdoms of this world, nor is He speaking directly about His Church; He is talking about His return and the Day of judgment. His, is a warning to you and to the person sitting next to you; indeed, it is a warning CHRIST speaks to each and every one of us. It is to His Bride, the Church, that JESUS says, “*Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.*”

JESUS often uses the number “*ten*” in His parables even as we see it throughout Holy Scripture. Ten is the Biblical number signifying completeness; therefore, we have the Ten Commandments, the ten talents of the faithful servant, ten silver coins of the old woman who never stopped searching for her lost coin, the ten servants, ten lepers, ten minas, and ten cities in the parable of the minas. Here we have ten virgins.

The ten virgins signify the visible Christian Church on earth in its completeness—all those who have believed the Gospel promise, from Moses and the prophets, to the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection, and on through the ascension of CHRIST to the eschaton, that is, to the end of time and His promised return. They represent all who have claimed, or ever will claim, to be believers. The ten virgins include you and me.

Yet, the pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven is not a natural pursuit for corrupt human hearts and souls. That is, such pursuit is not natural for any of us in our natural corrupt state, for we all fall far short of the glory of GOD, and therefore, it is a sad fact that not everyone who says, *“Lord, Lord,”* shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. There will be the foolish virgins, those who have the appearance of godliness, but deny its power. They will be the virgins who, being double-minded, have burned their lamps with no thought of the future, carelessly exhausting their supply of oil.

These are they who claimed the title *“Christian,”* but their piety never extends beyond the door of the church they attend. In Baptism, their lamps were made full, but when their Betrothed returns, their lamps will be found long empty. They never hungered for the Word of GOD. They never longed for the Bridegroom’s return. Committing adultery with the world, they gave up the teachings of JESUS in exchange for the doctrines of men.

We must be on guard against such apostasy, that is, we must guard against falling away from the faith once given to the saints. For the hour is at hand and the Day of Judgment may be closer than any of us realize, and even if judgment does not come before we have long been laid to rest, still, our last hour will come upon us unawares, and when it comes there will be no second chances.

Therefore, *“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”* Do not think that you will be able to purchase oil after the trumpet sounds the arrival of the Bridegroom. We are to be made ready before it is too late! *“Therefore... [do] not sleep, as others do, but... watch and be sober.”*

Brothers and sisters, we *“are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake [us] as a thief.”* We are aware of its coming, and it would be moronic to meet it unprepared. This awareness is purely of the HOLY SPIRIT and is freely given from the heart of God as a gift. Such a gift cannot be purchased through works or merit. GOD’s grace is not for sale or barter.

How then do we receive it? Through faith, begun in each of us by the HOLY SPIRIT through Baptism, and nourished and strengthened in us by the HOLY SPIRIT with the Word of CHRIST’s Gospel and His Holy Body and Blood in His Supper. This faith, CHRIST Himself will bring to completion on the Last Day. Until that Day these are the gifts GOD provides to sustain us. With these gifts we receive oil enough for the strength that will be needed to make it through another week with joy.

It is through these means alone that GOD comes to us. This is how GOD protects us from ourselves and our dangerous imaginings so that we do not waste our oil but conserve it,

watching and waiting for the return of His SON. Through these means alone we receive oil for our lamps and food for our souls.

Even now, the Bridegroom provides us with forgiveness, life and salvation. While we wait, we trust in Him and His promises. We keep our focus forever on the Cross of Calvary and His empty tomb. This is what we do while we are awake. This is what we do while we wait. This is how the virgin Bride of CHRIST is prepared.

Brothers and Sisters, to be wise is to see one's life in the light of eternity. That is why GOD teaches us to pray in Psalm 90, *"So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom."* A heart of wisdom is that heart which knows that JESUS CHRIST is the Bridegroom who was crucified for us and raised again to give us life. Wisdom is to know that He alone is the LORD who gives meaning and purpose to our days because His Blood has redeemed us and His resurrection has opened the door to Heaven. Wisdom knows that if we gain everything this world has to offer and yet do not have faith in CHRIST we have absolutely nothing. Wisdom knows that our LORD JESUS will return at an hour that no one knows and only those who have faith in Him will have access to His wedding hall.

To be a fool, to be a moron, on the other hand, is to live a life so pre-occupied with the projects and aspirations, the wants and the needs, of this passing world, that one has no time for JESUS, who is the Bridegroom and Husband to His Bride the Church. To be a fool, to be a moron, is to live as though GOD did not matter and as if you mattered most. To be a fool is to live as though there were only today and nothing else.

Fools and morons live as though there is no Judgment Day coming. To be a fool, to be a moron, is to forget your Baptism, ignore the LORD's preaching and the LORD's Supper, or to just go through the motions. Fools and morons neglect to take every opportunity to be in the presence of GOD in His Church. To be a moron is to ignore the need for the oil of faith, to think or conclude that oil, and therefore, true faith, really does not matter all that much.

But the oil does matter. As we have seen, oil is finally that which separated the wise from the foolish virgins. The oil in the parable points to something that is always being consumed and must always be replenished. That is the way it is with faith. Faith is not something that is static. Faith is living, and like a flame it must be fueled or it will grow dim and finally die. Faith does not feed on itself; it is fueled by the Words of our LORD poured into our ears, and His Body and Blood given us to eat and drink. In His Word, and with His Body and Blood, our LORD JESUS CHRIST is giving to us the gifts through which He keeps the flame of faith burning until that Day when He will return to usher us into the wedding hall in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Beloved, JESUS says *"Watch therefore, for you neither know the day nor the hour in which the SON OF MAN is coming."* We do not know what lies between today and the Day of His coming. We do not know what we might be called upon to suffer for the sake of His Name. We do not know what crosses we may have to carry. Will He return tomorrow or many centuries from now? We do not know and it does not really matter.

Yet, this we do know, our LORD JESUS CHRIST, crucified and risen from the dead is here with us, even this very morning, freely giving us the oil of faith which brings forgiveness, life, and salvation in His Word and Sacraments so that we will be prepared to receive Him when the call goes out *“Behold, the Bridegroom is coming; go out to meet Him!”*.

While we wait, we trust in GOD and His promises. We keep our focus forever on the Cross of Calvary and JESUS’ empty tomb. This is what we do while we are awake. This is what we do while we wait. This is how the wise virgin, the Bride of CHRIST is prepared.

So, come now to the chancel rail. *“Behold, the Bridegroom is coming....”* Come to the chancel rail and greet Him! Here, we exchange our wedding vows with JESUS. We say, *“I believe...”* and our Bridegroom responds, *“Dearly Beloved, I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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