LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

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THE THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
8th November 2026

Matt. 25:1 Jesus told this parable to his disciples: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this.
Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were
foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4
but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them
became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom!
Come out to meet him.' 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The
foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise
replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and
buy some for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those
who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the
other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he replied, 'Truly I tell you,
I do not know you.' 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS
At this point in the Liturgical Year, the lectionary turns to the end of time and to the teachings on watchfulness. Our parable today is unique to Matthew, although there are passages in Mark and Luke which resemble it in some way (see below Mark 13:33-37 and Luke 12:35-38).

KIND OF WRITING
There are several kinds of parables in the New Testament: "original" parables which are often disorienting and later more didactic parables. Our text belongs to this second category, which is more "teaching" and in general the meaning is plain. It is good to bear in mind that a single parable will never give all we need to bear in mind. The bottom line here is that there are some things, both in life and in faith, which others cannot do for us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
To engage with today's readings, it might helpful to go back in your own mind to someone in your life whom you regard as really wise. When did you become aware of it? Have you benefitted from it? If someone were to ask how would you recognise wisdom and what are its marks, what would you say? Have you learned from your encounters with wise people?
Do you desire wisdom for yourself? Perhaps as parent or friend or family member or colleague. Do you nourish your hunger (!) for the qualities and attitudes which we associate with people who have learned from life?

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

As the liturgical year draws to a close, we are asked to be aware that we believe that Christ will come again and that our attitude to now is to be informed by that understanding. In the parable for today, the story of the ten bridesmaids, the element of surprise or shock is present again as it seems that selfish behaviour is commended. That cannot be the case, so what is the point of the story? The point of the story is that we must strive to be wise, i.e. ready for the sudden and sometimes unforeseen demands of our Christian living. It is easy to fall into a rut, to be caught up in the day to day things and to forget the bigger picture. Christ reveals himself to us in ways and at times we do not expect so he calls us to be vigilant.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. While the parable has clear end-of-time applications it can also be applied to any moment of grace. It reminds us that moments of grace come unexpectedly, and we need to be awake to receive them. Recall times when you were alert for such a moment. What were the consequences for you?
2. Grace can also be disturbing. We can be coasting along in life and suddenly circumstances change (as in the current pandemic). We are shaken out of our routine and wonder how to respond. What wisdom have you learned in dealing with this crisis?
3. We may be tempted to judge the wise virgins as being selfish for not sharing with the others, but perhaps Jesus is teaching us that there are some things that other people cannot provide for us. We have to acquire them ourselves. What qualities in life do you see as the essential oil that you must provide for yourself?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

Many of Jesus' parables convey the same message in different ways. The best thing you have is hope. Don't waste it. Keep it alive. Jesus isn't using moral language. For him, letting hope die out is not a sin, but foolishness. The young women whose lamps go out are "foolish" because they are not doing the most important thing a human being can do: wait for God until the end.

The gospel invites us to keep awake. Christian hope does not settle down into sleep. It is restless; it keeps our sense of responsibility and creativity alert; it won't let us sleep. People who keep their lamps of hope burning are eternally unsatisfied people, never completely happy with themselves or with the world they live in. That is precisely why they get involved wherever others are struggling for a better, freer world.

These are the "wise" believers that our society to badly needs. People of tireless hope. Men and women who know that a rising standard of living is not the final salvation that can satisfy human needs. Believers who struggle for a more human world, knowing that it will never just develop out of our own efforts, but comes as a gift from the One in whom we will one day find our fullness.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - The Way Opened up by Jesus

General Comments

Today's passage is a teaching on "what the kingdom of heaven will be like" (verse 1). This biblical expression means the coming of grace into the world. The passage therefore is a teaching on grace, inviting us to recognise and celebrate our experiences of grace, and to prepare ourselves for future comings.

"Will be" is a reminder that the final and definitive coming of grace lies in the future, but the teaching also refers to the many partial but real comings of grace that we and our communities (including the worldwide human family) have experienced.

The teaching is parabolic so it is important to remind ourselves of how we meditate on a parable:

– The parable comprises different characters; we choose the one(s) we want to identify with and read the parable from his or her (their) perspective.

– A "crunch point" occurs at a certain stage of the story, a turning point which jolts us so that we know instinctively that this is the central moment in the parable. The "crunch point" will be different for different people; indeed it will be different for us at different stages in our lives.

In this parable there are four possible "crunch points":

1. -The moment of the cry, "the bridegroom is here" (verse 6) – grace always takes us by surprise.
2. -The foolish bridesmaids find out that their lamps are going out and the wise ones will not give them oil (verses 7 to 9) – grace is always "disturbing".
3. -The wise bridesmaids go with the bridegroom into the wedding hall (verse 10) – grace is pure joy.
4. -The foolish bridesmaids come late and are told "I don't know you" (vs 11 and 12) – grace brings feelings of remorse, despair even, but as a step to conversion.

In each case the bridesmaids represent two possibilities and we have been both at different times of our lives. The "wise" (a better word than the Jerusalem Bible's "sensible") are ourselves at our best, the "foolish" ourselves at our worst.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

We can speculate on what the oil in the lamps represents in this parable, and perhaps it is different for each one of us: the inner wisdom we know we should trust but are afraid to, that deep awareness of God's indwelling presence, a sense of fulfilment that we experience from doing acts of justice and mercy, loving God and neighbour. The 'foolish' were lacking in evidence of such deeds and so were shut out.

Sometimes we too find ourselves in this 'foolish' position, and when that happens the challenge is not to let ourselves close down. It is during such times we have the opportunity for conversion and through that the grace of gaining some insight or wisdom. We learn much from these experiences, unpleasant though they may be.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper