

Ord 32 A1 11/12/17 GA
Five Foolish Virgins

There was a crowd in the doctor's waiting room. An elderly gentleman rose and approached the receptionist.

"Miss," he said courteously, "My appointment was for 10 o'clock and it is almost eleven now. I can't wait any longer. Would you please give me an appointment for another day?"

One woman in the crowd leaned over to another and said, "He must be at least 80 years old. What could he have to do that he can't afford to wait?"

The man overheard the whispered remark. He turned to the lady, bowed and said, "I am 87 years old, ma'am. Which is precisely the reason why I cannot afford to waste a single minute of the precious time I have left."

We'll come back to this in a minute.

This Gospel is the final parable in Jesus' rather long discourse on the end times and the last things. He's doing his best to make it clear that this life and this world have an expiration date and that following that moment there will be judgment by God.

As best as He is able, Jesus tries to prepare not only those who sit with Him and hear Him speak, but also those who will hear His Gospel, for what is inevitable for everyone . . . without exception—Salvation for the just and condemnation for the wicked.

When we think about the end of the world, or even just our own last day, it's a very sobering reality. . . because if it's true then there is no escaping the fact that it's going to happen to each one of us. It's going to happen to "me"!

Many people get this far with these thoughts and then lock up in fear . . . which is quickly followed by denial or protest.

But the point that Jesus is making is that we don't have to fear the end of things.

Keep in mind that the parable describes a feast . . . a banquet in the nature of a wedding feast. This is a big deal . . . a wonderful event . . . something to look forward to!

Now some might say, "Wait a minute. In the parable half of the people don't make it into the feast! They're left outside to fend for themselves. That doesn't sound so wonderful."

"And besides, if these are all disciples of so great a master, why didn't the five with a lot of oil share with the five who ran out and then everybody gets in?" Seems to make sense by normal standards.

Let's consider what's happening in the story. In Palestine in Jesus' time the Bride and her attendant ladies would go in procession to meet the groom and welcome him. The time of his arrival was uncertain, so they had to be constantly ready!

So Jesus weaves into the story that the groom is delayed for a long time. Now all ten fall asleep, but only half of them have put enough oil in their lamps to do what's needed.

When these foolish ones ask for oil from the others, the wise ones tell them to "go and buy it for yourselves."

They're not being mean, they're saying, "We cannot give you what you need to be ready for the groom."

These foolish virgins came unprepared to welcome the groom.

They didn't put enough oil in their lamps and now they're out of time.

Even though the arrival of the groom was delayed, those who were wise understood that he was, indeed, coming and they kept themselves in a state of readiness. Once they knew the role that they would play and what was expected of them as attendants, they kept plenty of oil in their lamps

Their lights would be lit and shine when the groom arrives.

So obviously we're not talking about oil here.

What we're talking about is wisdom . . . the wisdom of God, not the world. We're talking about good works. . . and mercy . . . and justice . . . and faithfulness . . . and morality.

Essentially we're talking about a relationship with Jesus.

These are the things that keep us ready for the midnight cry that Jesus has returned (is back). They are things that no one else can give us! We have to come to these things ourselves.

Let me ask a rhetorical question: Let's extend the parable a bit.

Let's say those foolish people locked out of the feast send a message to the groom and remind him that fully half of the attendants were unprepared . . .they tell him that that's just short of a majority. They say it's the way things are done now, so they'd like him to think things over and let them in. They've talked about it and they think he's being unfair.

Do you think it would matter to the groom?

Majority rule? (Lots of people are doing it?)

Should it matter?

Will it matter?

The old man in the story that I told you . . . he's very wise.

The others in the waiting room think he's a crank who's being silly for not getting comfortable and waiting it out.

But why do I say he is wise?

Because he understands the limit of his lifespan (his expiration date). The wise do not waste a minute because they understand the relative importance of everything they do and every tick of of the clock.

They understand that if we are not striving to make the world better . . . then we're making it worse.

This world is a proving ground. By our actions we prove whether or not we are disciples of Christ . . . whether or not we are in a relationship with Him.

If someone is in relationship with their spouse their actions show it. Right?

So if someone is in relationship with Our Lord, then their actions show it. And that's why Jesus, the Groom, can say that some will share in His eternal feast . . . while some will hear him say, "Amen, I say to you, I do not know you."

And at the end of it all if we're not at the heavenly banquet . . . then there is only one other table to sit at and God doesn't want that for anyone.

So Jesus takes great pains to warn and explain. And so does the Church . . . and these readings . . . and so do I as your minister of the Gospel.

How then do we make a relationship with Christ?

A couple of things worth doing if we're not already doing them.

First – we have to get out of the waiting room and get to it!

Second – Pray! Talking to God is important. How can we get

to know someone if we refuse to talk to them and spend time with them? It doesn't work in a marriage and it doesn't work with God.

A third thing – check out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and put them into practice in our day to day existence.

The works of mercy aren't mysterious, ethereal happenings for those rare individuals who interface with the Divine. They're the efforts of human beings as we work at making Our Lord present in the world. Most of us probably practice some of these works already . . . but maybe we can increase our efforts.

Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. (spiritual works)

Feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead and giving alms. (corporal works)

These are all charitable actions where we come to the aid of our neighbor in his/her spiritual and bodily needs.

A fourth and final thing I'll mention is Virtue.

The four cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

They have other names in Scripture, but living virtuous lives allows us to perform the works of mercy.

If we don't consciously live the virtues of Jesus and do the merciful work of Jesus . . . how will Jesus ever be present in this broken world?

How will His light ever shine?

I would assume that everybody here wants to go to heaven.

Then let's not waste a minute of our lives.

Let's carry the light of Jesus Christ in this sleepy world.

Let's be ready!

And when Jesus comes He will know that we have been waiting for Him and He will know that He is welcome.

He is welcome in our home . . . and we will be welcome in His.