

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

Wis 6:12-16

Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

I Thes 4:13-18 or 4:13-14

Mt 25:1-13

Robert P. Hagan, O.S.A.

You are packing for a trip. You can't pack that much. It must fit in your carry on bag, because there is no checking the bag and waiting in more lines at baggage claim, or risking that they lose the bag all together. While you carefully put into the bag everything that you think you will need, invariably, something is left out or forgotten altogether. What...an umbrella, toothbrush, razor, one shoe, cell phone charger?

While we know that we can't pack everything all the time. Jesus' parable in today's Gospel is urging us to remember what is important to pack and how not to get caught short. The story says that ten virgins took their lamps with them to meet the bridegroom. The wise have packed enough oil for the wedding to start whenever the groom arrives; the foolish only have enough oil for their perceived timetable.

The foolish ones think they are wise. After all, they did have oil in their lamps. Sure, they fell asleep, but then so did the wise ones. However, the wise are well packed, well equipped for their task, regardless of how long or short it might be. Jesus is reminding us about our own spiritual journey. No matter how long or short a stay it might be, to be ready, prepared; well packed.

This is a sobering parable as there does come a point in time when it is too late to get into the wedding feast. Scholars point out that the bridegroom represents the second coming of Christ. Whether we are talking about the end of time, the end of the world or the end of our earthly existence, it is a reality that we would often rather not discuss or face.

All too often the circumstances of our lives will force us to confront such mysteries as the death and our own mortality. Natural disasters, disease and our own human finitude threaten, and take us and our loved ones everyday. November is the month in the liturgical calendar that the Church reserves to remember, and honor those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

These occasions can also be great opportunities to "ready ourselves." To see just how well we are packing. We hear Saint Paul exhort the Thessalonians, and remind us to pack some hope. He says that death will cause us to grieve, and we do grieve, but not like those without hope.

We hope in God and in the kingdom God has waiting for us. The time to get ready is now. We don't have control over when we will leave this earth. The very real fact exists that some of us here will not be alive this time next year-in spite of our best laid plans. It's ok to think about death. We don't have to obsess over it. This does not have to be a morbid thought. It can be a call to action...a way of life. There is a sense of urgency at the heart of this parable that calls us to get to know Christ as well as we can now, and trust that He will recognize us...will save us.

At first glance, it appears that the problem with the five foolish virgins is that they didn't bring enough oil for their lamps. However, we hear that the real reason for their exclusion from

the wedding feast is that they didn't have a personal relationship with the bridegroom. He didn't recognize them.

This Gospel is hardly about stocking up supplies. Yet it is about building up and maintaining a relationship...a reservoir of faith and hope in Jesus Christ that will help sustain us during our inevitable periods of waiting. It is about keeping our lamps burning brightly with the slow burning oil of faith, hope and love. This oil preserves our lamps so that they don't burn out because things didn't go as we had planned, or didn't happen as fast as we might like. We can choose to be prepared. We are to fill our internal lamps with the oil hope and love that comes from faith in Jesus Christ.

Think about appearing before God. Start packing now. It's all carry on...Keep oil in your lamp, and enough of it. How can we do this? What should we pack? Jesus showed us:

Reconcile with family members.

Forgive that person that hurt you.

Let go of those petty concerns and old ways of the world.

Put on Christ and love others...show compassion.

Take advantage of the wonderful gift of the sacrament of reconciliation that relieves the heavy burden of a past mistake or poor decision we have been carrying.

Spend the rest of whatever time we have left on this earth seeking God and finding Christ in everyone we meet.

Let your lamp burn brightly on the slow burning oils of faith, hope and love, for all to see. Our lives do have eternal consequences. The maidens couldn't borrow any more oil at the end of the parable. Such would be like dying and turning to someone and saying "lend me some of your lifetime...lend me some of the good things you did, give me some oil from your lamp."

C.S. Lewis summed it up most eloquently: "All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness. The day is coming when you will wake to find, beyond hope, that you have attained it, or else that it was within your reach and you have lost it forever."

This is not a gospel of doom and gloom. How could it be? The very word gospel means good news. We sometimes lose focus, lose energy, and are not as prepared as we ought to be. Jesus reminds us of how much God wants to restore and renew us, and how much He wants to be with us. He offers us grace to live the way He has shown us. He is reminding us of those things which are most important in life and saying, "Don't leave home with out them." Sometimes we do lose sight of Jesus in our lives. In the face of everything else that might be going on, let us not be distracted. Let our lamps burn brightly for all the world to see, and we will see God, and God will see us.

As we prepare to welcome Jesus in our midst through the Eucharist, let us continue to build our friendship with God and one another, trusting in the grace, power and mercy of Jesus, who through His death, has us all well packed and prepared for life!