Go Forth...
A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

WISDOM DEMANDS PREPAREDNESS



SUNDAY READINGS:

Wisdom 6:12-16

Psalm 63:2-8

Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

KEEPING OUR LAMPS BURNING BRIGHTLY

This Sunday's Gospel describes for us how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus' "kingdom parable" of the ten virgins is drawn from the customary wedding practices in Palestine. The bridesmaids were tasked with receiving and accompanying the bridegroom to the wedding festivities. It was customary to celebrate it at night; thus, the bridesmaids had to be equipped with lamps.

We all know well the parable of the ten virgins; five were wise and five were foolish. The foolish did not bring along any additional oil. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all fell asleep. At midnight the bridegroom came; the wise went in with him to the banquet. The foolish were late and missed their opportunity; they remained outside.

Pope Francis' Reflection. Francis asks: "What does Jesus want to teach us with this parable? He reminds us that we must be ready for our encounter with Him.... He tells us that to watch doesn't mean only not to sleep, but to *be ready*. In fact, all the virgins slept before the bridegroom's arrival, but when they awakened, some were ready and others not." We may ask: What is the meaning of being wise and prudent? Francis says: "It's about not waiting for the last moment of our life to collaborate with God's grace, but to do so already and from now on. It would be good to think a bit: one day will be the last. If it were today, how prepared am I?"

Further Wisdom. "The lamp is the symbol of faith that illumines our life, while the oil is the symbol of the charity that nourishes, makes fruitful and credible the light of faith. The condition to be ready for the encounter with the Lord is not only faith, but a Christian life rich in love and charity for our neighbor."

"If we let ourselves be guided by what seems to us more comfortable, by the pursuit of our interests, our life becomes sterile, incapable of giving life to others, and we don't accumulate any oil stock for the lamp of our faith. And, the latter—faith—will go out at the moment of the Lord's coming, or even before."

Encouraging Words. Provided "we are vigilant and we seek to do good, with gestures of love, of sharing, of service to our neighbor in difficulty, we can remain at peace while we await the coming of the bridegroom. The Lord can come at any moment, and even the sleep of death does not scare us, because we have the reserve of oil, accumulated with the good works of every day."

Pope Francis concludes his reflection, saying: "May the Virgin Mary help us to make our faith ever more operative through charity, so that our lamp can shine already here in our earthly journey, and then forever at the wedding feast in paradise." We fervently pray and labor so as to belong to the "wise" with lighted lamps and an abundant supply of oil!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16
The Old Testament Book of Wisdom, written in Greek around 100 BC, tells of wisdom, describing the best way to relate to God and others in this life. Today's reading presents wisdom as a person; she can be found by all those who love her and ardently search for her. Note that those who seek her will not be disappointed; they will find her, be freed from care, and rejoice in the encounter.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 63:2-8
Today's psalm refrain declares that the one who fears the Lord is truly blessed. It also details what this "fear" practically means for our daily living. It demands being gracious and lending, conducting one's affairs with justice, and lavishly giving to the poor. Such a person will be in everlasting remembrance and his horn will be exalted in glory.

Second Reading: Thessalonians 4:13-18
In today's reading Paul continues addressing the Thessalonians. The Church there had a special problem. They expected Christ's second coming very soon; they were feeling sorry for those who had already died and would not be able to greet Christ at his return. Paul explains that the resurrection of the dead will happen before Christ's second coming; thus, the Thessalonians (and us) are *not to worry*.

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13
For the past thirty Sundays we have been reading consecutively from Matthew's Gospel. Today's passage stresses the need for always being prepared, expectantly waiting for the Lord to come. This reality is clearly illustrated by a little parable which is based on Palestinian matrimonial customs. It teaches us as active missionary disciples to be prepared at all times for the Lord's return.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► ***Living in Joyful Hope***, ► ***Exploring Vatican II Treasures, and*** ► ***A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*** (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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