

32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A: Nov. 12th 2023
Wisdom 6:12-16; 1Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Once again, this Sunday Jesus presents another kingdom parable which warns us against our unpreparedness for our eternal journey. On the second of November we specially remembered our departed dear ones. Again November marks the end of two great seasons, the summer and the beautiful fall. When we look at the nature, we feel already some sort of dead atmosphere prevailing. Again, November marks the end of the current liturgical cycle A too. So probably, the Church feels it is appropriate to give us a little thought on the end of our journey on earth. Of course, every end gives way to a beginning; the end of the fall season marks the beginning of winter; the end of the current liturgical year gives way to the beginning of another; **the end of our life on earth marks the beginning of our life in another world, for good or bad.** So there is no need of any panic or concern, provided we are prepared.

In order to make this message clear for his disciples, Jesus tells the parable of the 10 virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom. Of course, here the point of interest is the five foolish ones who were not prepared for any unexpected twist in the situation. This parable may not make any sense in the modern age. But it was well understood by the audience of Jesus as the wedding ceremony took place the way Jesus speaks in this parable.

This parable can raise some questions in our minds such as, *'why didn't the five wise ones share some of their oil?' 'Why didn't the five foolish ones get another chance, instead of being kicked out with first mistake?'* But the parable should be understood for its message, not literally. The oil Jesus speaks here represents our personal relationship with God which must be personally developed and cannot be shared with someone or cannot be borrowed. Once someone wrote an article entitled: **'God has no grandchildren.'** We either have a relationship with God as son or daughter or we do not. We cannot claim to have relationship with God because our parents are good Catholics and Church goers. During my long pastoral life in the Diocese many young couples who stopped practicing their faith approached me with the request to baptize their babies with the introduction, "Our parents belong to this Parish. So they think that the merit of their parents is sufficient. But they cannot share the merits of the parents; their merits will go with them.

The oil also stands for our Christian character. A person cannot take someone else's character and makes it his/her own. He/she has to acquire it for himself/herself. So

this parable gives us a strong message that there are certain things which we cannot inherit or borrow from others. And also this parable warns us that the last minute effort to prepare will not work out. When the Queen of England, Mary of Orange, was dying, her chaplain sought to tell her about salvation. Her answer was: **“I have not left this matter to this hour.”** One day while Francis Assisi was working in his small garden, one of his fellow religious asked him, ‘Francis, what will you do, if you are told that it is your last day of life?’ *Francis answered without any hesitation: ‘I will complete my work first?’* Only a person who is well prepared for his end of journey can answer with such ease.

Very often with all our stress and worries to keep our life comfortable in this material world, we forget about our life beyond this world. Coming to the matter of our practice of faith and developing our relationship with God, **we think about ‘a tomorrow.’** Tomorrow I will do it. But many forget the fact that the expectation to have ‘a tomorrow’ is a wild dream, which may not be even materialized. The devil always tell people, ‘In religious matters, don’t worry, you can do them tomorrow.’ Life is very short and only today is ours. In Ps. 90 the Psalmist describes the brevity of human life: In verses 5&6 we read: **“They disappear like sleep at dawn; they are like grass that dies. It sprouts green in the morning; by evening it is dry and withered.”** Then v.10 says, **“Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty, if we are strong; Most of them are sorrow and toil; they pass quickly, we are all but gone.”** So it is an undisputed truth that one day we all have to leave this world timely or untimely; willingly or unwillingly, prepared or unprepared. That is why in Luke’s gospel 12:40 Jesus asks us: **“You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”**

Remember, a tree which is bent to a particular direction, eventually will fall to that direction. Similarly, a person who is away from God may not be able to make a last minute return. So we need to be always with the Lord. In Psalm 91:14-15 we read, **“Whoever clings to me I will deliver; whoever knows my name I will set on high. All who call upon me I will answer, I will be with them in distress.”** *Paul warns us in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, “For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”*