

“Be Prepared”

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year A

Wisdom 6:12-16
Psalms 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

The Boy Scouts of America, with their eight point oath and their twelve point law, have as their motto a simple two word phrase: “Be Prepared” – to do a good turn daily, to respond to an emergency, to use the skills developed during their training as a scout to take care of themselves and others in a life of service.

Long before the Scouts uttered that simple motto, Jesus, encouraged His disciples to do the same with regard to the coming of the Kingdom and His return in glory – Be prepared; stay awake; *“gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants awaiting their master’s return, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks”* (Luke 12:35-36). The parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids takes that teaching of preparedness to another level as Jesus elaborates on just what it means to “be prepared.”

The Wise Bridesmaids of the parable had diligently prepared themselves for the arrival of the Bridegroom. They not only brought enough oil for the present, but prepared for its necessity in the future. The Foolish Bridesmaids, on the other hand, had no doubt prepared themselves at first. However, they did not prepare for the future. They had oil to begin with, but trusting in their previous accomplishments, the Foolish Bridesmaids decided they had done enough,

and that it would carry them far enough into the future. When their oil ran out, however, they had nothing to burn when the Bridegroom finally arrived. In the end, they found themselves not only in dire need of oil, but completely unknown to the Bridegroom himself, who refused to grant them entry to the wedding feast.



Applying the parable brings to mind interesting reflections with regard to Christ’s admonition to be prepared for the Great Return and the coming of the Kingdom. In reflecting on the Foolish Bridesmaids, we can draw certain conclusions about the nature of the preparedness in

which Jesus is calling us to engage.

First, proper preparedness is not *retroactive*. The Foolish Bridesmaids believed that the oil they had stored from the past would get them through to the moment the bridegroom returned. In the end, the oil ran out, they were left with nothing to burn, and missed the arrival of the bridegroom who denied ever knowing them.

Second, preparedness is not

Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids

transferrable. The Foolish Bridesmaids were hoping that their wise sisters would be able to share the oil they had saved. The Wise, however, could not share their oil with the Foolish, who were left to rush desperately to make up for lost time, only to discover that it was too little, too late.

The parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids is one that should give all of us pause, especially those who, in their complacency, have developed the presumption that in the end, no one will be left out when the Kingdom of God comes. Christ repeatedly warns us that this is not the case. There will be those who are left out. There will be those who thought Jesus knew them, but in their foolishness and complacency never realized they were drifting further and further away from Him, to the point that Christ no longer knows them.

Where do we see ourselves in this parable; as priests called to preach the faith, laity called to live their faith, parents called to teach that faith to their children, and as a Church called to gather as one body to celebrate the great mysteries of our faith? Do we find ourselves growing lax in our preparedness for Christ's return in glory? Do we find ourselves "resting on our laurels" rather than "girding our loins"? Have we grown complacent in how we shepherd the faithful, in how we practice the faith, and in how we teach it to our children?



The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (1822) by William Blake

Has our laxity affected the future prosperity of the Church insofar as our children, in the end, do not practice the faith when they are adults? Do we take for granted that we were once "good practicing Catholics" only to be less so in our old age maintaining, "I've done my time" and "I'm too old for that sort of thing now"? Do we expect that the zeal and good, faithful practice of others will

somehow be transferrable to us, despite our foolish complacency?

As we approach the end of our liturgical year; as we prepare to enter into a new year on the first Sunday of Advent; [as we prepare to be renewed as a worship community with the up and coming enhancements to our Roman Missal;] as we take stock of our previous year to assess where we are in our lives as followers of Christ, and worshippers of Almighty God; let this truly be a time to prepare for the renewal of our personal commitment to communal worship as Christ's Church, and our individual observance of Christ's Gospel as individual followers, and thereby be caught awake, alert, and prepared, with plenty of oil in our own lamps, when the Bridegroom finally makes his appearance, whenever and however that may be.

Fr. William Nicholas
November 4, 2011