

# NOVEMBER 12, 2017

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

READING 1 [WIS 6:12-16](#)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM [PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8](#)

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R. (2b) **My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

READING 2 [1 THES 4:13-18](#)

GOSPEL [MT 25:1-13](#)

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Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

## HOMILY

In the Summer of 1985, I had already decided to move from Michigan to the promised land of Iowa, to pursue graduate studies at Iowa State. There was one small problem: I had to finish my college degree in Michigan first! With graduation slated for December of that year, though all my course work was completed, it was a matter of finishing up my work at the General Motors Foundry who had sponsored me through the engineering degree that included work experience in the plant. While biding my time, I thought that maybe it might be a good time to volunteer through my parish at the time, St. Helen, in Saginaw MI. The parish was served by an energetic young priest, Fr. Michael Bell, with whom I made an appointment to see where I "might get more involved." I stopped at the rectory at the appointed time and soon found myself sitting in his office, sharing some "small talk" about life. But . . . because of this alleged "small talk," we never quite got to the issue of my volunteering in the parish. For, after I shared about my work as an industrial engineer and what that was like, he asked, "have you ever thought about doing anything else?" to which I replied, "I once thought about being a priest, but I got over that!" He was not ready to let me off the hook that easy! He then pressed me to consider more fully if the priesthood might be a possibility for me. But you see, I had already made plans for my life, and priesthood was not part of it. As I began to break into sweat, and as he kept up the heat, one thought emerged in my mind: "I've got to get out of here!" Sensing my anxiety, Fr. Mike was merciful, but not too merciful. As I fought to end the conversation, he simply said, "Ask God what he would want you do."

What kind of question was that? For, to be honest, I did not really think that God particularly wanted me to do anything. When I say "particularly," I mean that I believed in general that God

was good and had good plans for us, but I had not yet accepted the fact that he had a “particular,” that is unique, plan and hope for me. In this, I vastly underestimated two things: God’s unique love for ME, and the uniqueness of how God had created me. For, despite some claims to the contrary, we are, each of us, so marvelously, uniquely created that we are irreplaceable, such that no one else can take my place in the wide sweep of God’s plan. What I had to accept was that God did make me unique and for a unique mission in life that only I could fully fulfill. Sure, I was called to live and work together with others, but they too each had a special uniqueness in their creation and their vocation. What I had to accept was that the mission to provide for the spiritual encouragement and strengthening of the church was not something that I could merely leave to others and remain a spiritual “consumer,” but that I was needed (from my creation) by God to take up my unique and essential role to provide for those needs.

It’s the astonishing, remarkable message at the very center of today’s Gospel. In any parable of Jesus that speaks about the return of the bridegroom, Jesus is alluding to the end of time, the final judgment, when all will be fulfilled and gathered into God’s eternal kingdom when Jesus comes again. The virgins awaiting the bridegroom’s return represent all of us, we who are longed for by God to be his beloved. While awaiting our Lord’s coming, we are to bear our gifts of light and warmth, ready to offer them to others, so that “whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters” (*cf.* Matthew, ch. 25), we do for the Lord. We hear that there are five wise and five foolish virgins, who have as their jobs to be prepared. Five wise ones are well-practiced and prepared to let the light of their gifts shine up to the time of the Groom’s return, while five are not prepared with lamps trimmed and oil ready. I wonder what these foolish ones have been doing, while they were waiting? It seems clear that, by their reaction at the return of the Groom, that they have not accepted the fact that something will be required of them—something so unique and special that no one else can provide it—their own special light and warmth of life that only they can give, but instead try to borrow from others.

Friends, can we accept this astonishing teaching from Jesus, that we are each so unique and special in our creation and that we have gifts that no one else can give, that our lives and service are irreplaceable? Can we accept the truth that, in the end, we cannot rely on others to give what we alone have to give: particular gifts of life and love to those in our lives that only can come from us? In the end, the parable is not about the selfishness of the “wise” virgins, but the stinginess of the foolish ones, who have something that no one else can provide and yet do not have the love necessary to see their goodness and obligation to take up their divine vocations to love in an irreplaceable way!

In the parable, we are the virgins, whose first and primary obligation is to the One, the Bridegroom, who gave us life and who comes to take us to eternal life in the Eucharist we are about to share. Lord, fill us with the faith and the certainty we need to see we are incomparably and uniquely created with irreplaceable gifts AND fill us with the love we need to dedicate ourselves to using these gifts of in service of others. For it is literally true that no one else can bring what we have and others will be deprived unless we bring our light of love to serve them. Give us the wisdom, loving God, to see our unique, irreplaceable gifts. And, at the end of our lives, most merciful Lord, may we hear not “I do not know you,” but rather, “well done, good and faithful servant,” who have done what no other human being can do: use our unique gifts to love and serve you by serving others. Quite simply, this is what God would have us do with our lives.