

Thirty-second Sunday of the Year A

Matthew 25:1-13

1 Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: 3 the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, 4 whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him." 7 At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, 8 and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." 9 But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." 10 They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. 11 The other bridesmaids arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." 12 But he replied, "I do not know you." 13 So stay awake because you do not know either the day or the hour.'

Other readings: Wisdom 6:12-16 Psalm 62 (63) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

This parable, unique to the Gospel of Matthew, is one section of the fifth and final great speech of Jesus, which considers the end of the world and the gathering together of God's people. This final speech also contains the great drama of the judgement: 'Whenever you did this to the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me.'

The parable of the ten bridesmaids is full of symbols. Jesus is described as the bridegroom repeatedly in the four gospels. Earlier in this gospel (9:15), in a reference to his passion and death, he spoke of himself as 'the bridegroom who will be taken away'.

This image has its origins in the Jewish Scriptures, where the relationship of the people to God was compared to that of a bride to her husband. The Church, the new people of God, is rightly described as the bride of Christ. It is the role of the bridesmaid to accompany and serve the bridegroom. We all take on this task from the time of our baptism. But will we be ready when the bridegroom appears?

The symbol of the lamp brings an even clearer allusion to Christian life and to the sacrament of baptism. We receive the light of Christ when we are baptised, and we are constantly challenged to keep the light burning brightly. This responsibility is reflected in the determination of the sensible bridesmaids not to let their lamps go out. The foolish bridesmaids, on the other hand, have allowed themselves to be distracted from what is really important in their lives.

Do I see my life as a preparation to meet the Lord?

Do I nourish my life with prayer and the sacraments?

We pray for those who have lost their way on the journey of life.

We ask for a deeper appreciation of the gifts the Lord bestows on us.