

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD  
IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY  
NOVEMBER 12, 2023  
THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**SCRIPTURES: 6**

**Wisdom 6:12-16**

Wisdom is found by those who look for it.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

God will bring the living and dead to life in Christ.

**Matthew 25:1-13**

The Bridegroom comes! Go out to meet him!

**SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:**

**Matthew:**

The Parable of the Ten Maidens is very well known to those who are older. We used to hear it at least three times each week at daily Mass! Before the reform of the liturgical calendar, and before we were given the Lectionary now in use, the Gospel at Mass for the Feasts of Virgins was always the same: The Parable of the Ten Virgins. And there were more virgins than you could shake a stick at in the Roman calendar. As adolescents, we used to groan whenever this Gospel was read, *again*. As a young priest, I used to groan whenever I had to read it, *again*!

Familiarity does not equal understanding, though. It's a bit more subtle than it appears at first hearing. In his letters, Paul had taught that the end of the world would come soon. Many early Christians believed this. Some passages in the Gospels indicate that Jesus, too, might have taught that the end would come soon after his death and resurrection: When the years and the decades passed and the end had not yet arrived, some major disappointments, fears, anxieties, and controversies arose. Why has the end not come yet?

Matthew wants to address that question. Why does the Bridegroom delay in coming? What have we done or not done to cause Jesus to delay his return in glory? How are we supposed to live with that delay in the meantime, and how are we best going to prepare for the Coming when it does occur?

The Church, which is the Bride of Christ, is ready; she has already entered and is waiting for the Groom. The celebration cannot begin until the Groom arrives. But the Church is also made up of those who still need to prepare themselves before they can welcome the Groom. They need to acquire the virtues that will be required for qualification upon entering the place of celebration. It is not just a matter of waiting passively for Christ to come again. There is work to be done in the meantime; there are spiritual assets to be acquired. On first hearing this parable, children often say: "Why didn't the five wise virgins share with the foolish ones? Weren't we taught we must share with those who have less than we do?" It is hard to explain that one cannot acquire a virtue for anyone else. One cannot give away a virtue.

**Wisdom:**

The Book of Wisdom is not generally recognized as Scripture in most Protestant editions of the Bible. Today, some editions do contain this and other "Apocryphal Books" in an appendix. It was not originally written in Hebrew but was to be found in the Greek version of the Jewish Bible called the Septuagint (LXX), the Bible used by the early Christian communities and by the Gospel writers.

The Book of Wisdom was most likely written just before the birth of Jesus by a teacher of Jewish philosophy who wrote for Greek-speaking Jews. In the first section (1:1-6:21), the author concludes his claim that wisdom will obtain eternal life for those who possess it. So, he ends this passage by asserting that all should seek this great gift. Because of its divine origin, wisdom is personified and has come to represent God. Wisdom initiates the search by which God *is found by those* who seek God.

### **Thessalonians:**

This first of the Christian canonical Scriptures to be written, long before the writing of the Gospels, addresses some of the disputes in the community at Thessalonika. Specifically, there was a disagreement about what would happen to those who were still alive at the time of Christ's return. Would they be disadvantaged in some way when those who had died were raised and taken to heaven? Paul, who also believes at this point that Christ will return to judge the world in their own lifetime, assures them that no one will have any advantage. Those who are alive will be taken *up into the clouds* (into heaven) along with the dead. Fundamentalist Christians have made a big deal out of this passage, referring to the *rapture* or the *taking up*. What will happen to your car on the highway when you are *raptured*? A literal reading of this imagery in Paul leads to all kinds of weird conclusions.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What are the values and the virtues which the Church as a whole, and which your parish in particular, need to acquire before it can be admitted into the presence of the Groom? What is still lacking in the Church community before the Lord can take it to himself finally as his eternal Bride? What have we not done yet that we still need to do? List all the good works that your parish or your prayer group or your small faith-sharing community have yet to accomplish before your task is complete?

2. Are you still actively awaiting the return of the Lord? With fear and trepidation? With joy and eagerness? Do you have an active awareness that the Lord will return to take the Church to himself in consummation as his eternal Bride? Or is it just like a fairy tale, not quite real? What do you need to do to awaken your awareness to the reality of Christ's return?

3. What do you think the Lord expects of the Church in order to be more prepared for his coming? What would you do differently if you knew for sure that Christ will come five years from now, or will not come?

## **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

Ask your family and/or your faith-sharing group to decide what you need to do together to better prepare for the Second Coming of Christ.

## PRAYER

In the world where the fullness of your peace will be revealed, gather people of every race, language, and way of life to share in the one eternal banquet with Jesus Christ the Lord.

(Conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation: II)

## CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Catholics have difficulty dealing with Protestant fundamentalists in most areas of discussion. Perhaps one of the most troubling is that of the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgment, the Anti-Christ, the so-called *Rapture*, the *Millennium*, or 1000 Years at the End. What is the Catholic tradition on these questions?

Paul teaches that when Christ returns to judge the world (an event he believed was going to happen any moment now), those who have been faithful will be taken *up into the clouds to meet the Lord*. The Church teaches that there is no radical separation between those who have died and those who are still alive. We all share in one communion of saints with Christ who was the first to be raised from death. We will all be raised as he was. There is no need to separate the living from the dead at this moment.

There will be a judgment at the end of time. A day will come when the world as we know it, and the work of evangelization, will be complete. Christ will take all that is his to be presented as a kingdom worthy of his Father in heaven. When we have completed our work on earth, when the whole universe has been transformed by the values of the Gospel and permeated with the holiness of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, then Christ will come again to confirm what has been done by us in his name. That is *judgment*. That is the final disposition of reality that has now been fully conformed to God's will.

Judgment belongs to Christ, but it is based on what we have done with the charge that has been given us to bring all things under his rule. The work of evangelizing all peoples, the work of consecrating all of reality, the task of bringing the order of God's will to all creation, belongs to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic tradition is one in which the Church has been commissioned by Christ to carry on his ministry until all is complete. Ministry, sacramental celebrations, preaching and teaching, taking care of the poor, etc., all this is the work of building the reign of God and bringing closer the day of salvation.

Fundamentalists are not convinced when we bring forth our version of all this.

(See *The Catechism*: #671, 673, 677-678, 681-682, 830, 988, 1038-1041, 1051-52)

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