

32nd Sunday per Annum - A
Wisdom 6:12-16;
I Thessalonians 4:13-18;
Matthew 25:1-13
Little Flower - 11/8/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Every year as the Church year draws to a close, our Liturgies begin to focus on Christ's future and final return in glory and challenge us to be prepared for his return. This is certainly true about today's Liturgy.

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians was the earliest New Testament writing. It is clear in Paul's early writings that he and the communities to which he was writing believed that Christ's return in glory was imminent. The question Paul was answering in today's reading was whether those who had died prior to Christ's return would be at a disadvantage when he returned. His answer was that neither the living nor the dead would be disadvantaged. He was coming for the salvation of both the living and the dead. Those who are saved will always be with the Lord and, implicitly, with one another. Paul then concluded with an invitation to hope.

The parable of the ten virgins challenges us to be prepared for Christ's return. "*The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.*" Five were foolish, and five were wise. The wise came prepared; the foolish came unprepared. The wise brought oil for their lamps; the foolish did not. Therefore, the foolish tried to scam some from the wise. When the wise refused and they went off to buy oil, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. The reference to the wedding feast makes it clear that Jesus was referring to his return in glory and the coming of God's kingdom.

Contrary to Paul's and the early Church's expectation that Christ's return was imminent, two thousand years later Christ has still not returned in glory. However, at different times during those two thousand years, many people have been convinced or convinced themselves that Christ's return was imminent. This was especially true as the year 1000 approached. This was also somewhat true as the year 2000 approached. Today many people believe that they are seeing signs of his imminent return in current events, perhaps even in the current pandemic.

The truth is that we have no idea when Christ will return in glory. Christ even told his apostles that even he did not know when it would occur: "*But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*" [Mt. 24:36]. Because there is no good reason to believe Christ's return is imminent, most of us are not going to spend any time thinking about it or preparing for it.

At the same time, although Christ's return in glory may not be imminent, we neither know the day nor the hour when Christ will return for us. If we did not think about this before, the deaths from the coronavirus should have awakened this realization in us. If we are in the state of grace when we die, we will be saved; if we are not in the state of grace when we die, God will not force his love upon us and, therefore, we will not be saved.

My brothers and sisters, both today's reading from the Book of Wisdom and today's Gospel are about wisdom. However, they represent two kinds of wisdom. In the Old Testament, to be wise is to see as God sees. As persons, we are called to seek the wisdom of God. However, the reading also suggests that God's wisdom seeks us. If we allow our lives to be guided by God's wisdom, we will be prepared to welcome Christ when he comes for us. In today's Gospel, the wisdom of the five wise virgins is a very practical wisdom. They knew to bring oil for their lamps. One of most important things parents, teachers, and other adults can do for children and young people is to help them learn practical wisdom but also to help them to see as God sees so that they will be prepared for Christ's return for them.