32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Looking Forward and Keeping Our Lamp Lit

Wisdom 6:12-16; Psalm 63:2,3-4,5-6,7-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Dear brothers and sisters,

Every Sunday, we recite the Nicene Creed. We declare what we believe. At the end of the Creed, in the 11th and 12th articles of faith, we say, "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We look forward to it, we await it, we anticipate it, and we prepare for the day when we shall share in God's glory. 'Looking forward to it' evokes joyful anticipation. Do you look forward to that day with joy?

However, not everyone is in such a state of joyful expectancy. There are all sorts of things in life that take up our time and attention, keeping us very busy, very much in the world, and thus distracted from the very joy of waiting for the Lord. As we come to the end of the liturgical year, the Church once again calls us to the joy of expectancy. That is precisely what our responsorial psalm is about: "My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God" (Ps. 63:2b). That is the psalm of the humble, the one who is not proud and longs for heaven.

St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is saturated with the theme of Christian hope and expectation. There is no doubt that death is not the end and that we shall indeed be raised. Just as Christ died and was raised, so too will those who are in Him and who die in Him be raised. He says explicitly: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thes 4:16). He wants us to hold on to that hope and to look forward with great expectation to our resurrection and the glorious transformation that will take place in us. If we continue to live and stand in the faith, we will be with the Lord.

How do we cultivate joyful anticipation?

First, we must beg the Holy Spirit in prayer for the grace of Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom says that desiring Wisdom is the very perfection of prudence, and he who seeks it is speedily delivered from care (Wis 6:15). If we make it a practice to seek Wisdom from God, we are delivered from all anxiety and care. If we have the habit of seeking Wisdom from above, we are delivered from the burden of trying to work out the mystery of life. The truth is, we don't have the answers; God does. Wisdom leads us to put our trust in God as our Guide. Our only hope is in conforming to His Wisdom. That Wisdom is not the product of human intellect; it is not the fruit of human search; it is a grace which we must humbly beg from God. We acquire it by reading the Bible, meditating, praying, and being in the company of the saints.

Secondly, we foster a joyful expectation by realizing that our life here on earth is a dress rehearsal for Heaven. It's a life of daily discipleship. Our Lord Jesus makes this point in the Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins. The parable comes from a very different cultural context than that of Jesus' day and concerns a Jewish wedding. On the wedding day, the bridegroom and his friends would go to the bride's family house to bring the bride out. They would normally arrive in the dark, and the bride and her maids would be waiting. The maids would then join the celebrations and accompany the bride to the groom's house, where the party would be. They would carry their oil lamps and sing love songs as they walked.

Here we have a picture of joyful anticipation. Remember, the wise virgins weren't preparing for a funeral. They were preparing for a wedding feast! That's the point Jesus is making. He doesn't want us to be in a state of fear regarding death. He wants us to be in a state of joyful expectation of

meeting Him. Preparing for the end doesn't mean we're to be in a state of fear or to go about in anxious anticipation, desperately looking for some prophet or seer who will tell us the secret timetable of God's end of the world. The Lord will come on the Last Day to judge both the living and the dead. We don't know when or how. Our job is to be ready.

Thirdly, we don't take our eternal destiny for granted. The foolish virgins who didn't have enough oil had the chance to make use of the time while they were waiting. They could have done something to prevent themselves from running out of oil; they just took it for granted. They took their role and their very participation for granted. They completely ignored the value of what was at stake during the waiting period.

In reality, we have all the time and all the space to live fully, rather than wasting it all until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "Stay awake, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt 25:13). We're all very much concerned about having enough money in retirement, are we not? We make sure our children are properly educated, are we not? Do we make sure they grow up in a relationship with God and with a love for others? We spend a great deal of time on our houses. How much time do we spend on our hearts? We can be very careful about not losing our money, yet not at all careful about losing our integrity, our compassion, our relationship with God. We can be very successful at preparing for life on earth and yet utterly unprepared for life in heaven.

The best preparation for the end is to be like the wise virgins. They had enough oil in their lamps to keep them burning. The lamp is the Christian faith, and the oil is good works. Both are essential; faith without works or deeds is dead (James 2:17). Deeds are the language of truth, revealing what our lips may try to embellish and what our hearts may try to hide.

Our Lord Jesus says to His disciples: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

May the Lord find our lamps burning brightly with faith, hope, love, and smiles.

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Pastor