

Homily

32nd Sunday OT - A

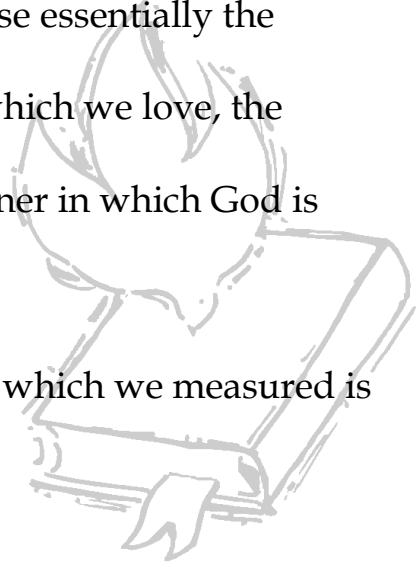
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
November 11-12, 2023

Wis 6: 12-16
Ps 65: 2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
1 Thes 4: 13-18
Mt 25: 1-13

Of all the texts in which I have focused in my own personal life, the 25th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel seems to be the one on which I focus the most. Essentially what I call the 25th Chapter of Matthew's Gospel is a type of "final exam" in my life, which God offers us just like I would give to the university students that I teach.

In this chapter, we are presented three stories which focus on three approaches concerning "the eschaton," or the end of the world and our final judgment day. The story of the virgins, the story of the coins and the separation of the sheep from the goats run through my mind over and over again (especially in today's age) because essentially the manner in which we are ready, the manner in which we love, the manner in which we treat each other is the manner in which God is going to treat us.

In Matthew 25, we learn that the measure by which we measured is



ultimate used to measure us. This chapter, and the one from Mark 13, pretty much define the way that God is going to judge us or, more appropriately, the manner in which we judge ourselves by the way we conduct our lives.

These passages from Matthew establish our destiny in three pretty radical stories. St. Paul references this in the first letter to the Thessalonians. The people of Thessalonica around 50 AD were worried that they were not ready for Christ, and those that have gone before him were not going to be with God either. Paul responded by saying that we do not know the day that Christ was going to return, but we must live each day as if it was our last. This has been preached to us constantly yet it is a message that often is overlooked. You and I both know that we do not live each day as if it is our last. For us on earth, society has conditioned us to plan for our retirements, to plan for our children's education, to plan for vacations and upcoming purchases and all those things in life that come down the line.

The question remains, though – do we act as if today is the last day of our lives? If we did, we probably would act much differently than we do right now. Perhaps we might love in a different way and reconcile with each other more immediately. Perhaps we would treat each other a bit differently if today was the last day of our lives.

The idea of knowing what truly is important and putting everything else aside is a constant theme and which I try to teach my students... and I have to teach myself. This is a message I try to preach to you, sometimes successfully but most often not. The problem is that we are attached and conditioned to living a way that is contrary to the gospel – we are conditioned to believe that those human attachments in life mean something when in the end they do not mean anything at all.

What these scriptural passage really tell us is that our relationship with God is the one for which we need to prepare but rarely do; we get so caught up in preparing for vacations and retirements and our children's futures that our lamps run so dry that there is nothing left for

God and, when the time comes, will we be ready to enter the doors of paradise or will we be the ones on the outside pleading, “Lord, Lord, open the door for us?” to which God may very well respond, “Amen, it is as if I never knew you”??

When I arrived in this area full-time some four years ago, we did not have the opportunity to celebrate the sacraments as we do today – the door was closed to too many people. We did not celebrate that many quinceañeras; we did not celebrate that many weddings nor did we celebrate baptisms (in one parish, we celebrated nothing at all). Now, my schedule is overloaded with meetings of those who want to enter the church... and we have an obligation according to the gospel to serve. I ran out of energy these last two weeks, so when I had a chance to pick up six pallets of chips two weeks ago, I had to say “no.” This week, I asked Ted Peterson and Van Drunen Farms to pick up four pallets of bottled water for the food pantries and the needy of the area. Paul Bukowski and Joe Bravo were nice enough to pick up food pallets in the

future for our area. Joe Kraus was hospitalized this week from overworking his heart with all the good he has done for our parishes this last year or so. There are many other examples of good service in our community that responds to the gospel of readiness, from our Thanksgiving Drives to the Veterans Home Drive to kids raking lawns to things of that nature. There are many who *do not* serve or serve enough; it is not my place to judge who these people are by God knows and so do they.

What we *do* know from our scripture readings is that God wants to welcome people to church and we have an obligation to offer that welcome and hospitality, to share the grace of God given to us so we can give it to them and to teach our neighbor that this grace is never to be hoarded; it was always meant to be given away. I have an obligation to pass it on to you and you have an obligation to share it with each other. If we choose not to do this, we show God our lamps are empty and God responds accordingly. If we live like Christ... we show God we

want to live in love and with love for the rest of our existence and that door remains open to us, the eye of a needle looks exceedingly small to a camel but to a person of faith that eye becomes wide enough for all people of faith to enter.

I remind myself how Fr. Jason Nesbit celebrated the picnic Mass at St. Patrick's on September 24th and mentioned how a parish that was like a ghost town in 2019 is now growing so wonderfully in the area. If he had been at our St. Anne breakfast in October, he would have said the same thing. It is too bad that the numbers at those events do not repeat themselves in church each week – for our sakes, we need to evangelize these folks and bring them to Church each week to show God we care and for their sakes, they need to build a relationship with God in the manner in which God speaks to us if they wish to enter the gates of heaven.

In this “Spirit,” I constantly preach how those in the “Hindu” faith tradition understand the importance of this “Spirit” they encounter in

every person they meet with a bow and the greeting, “Namaste,” a Sanskrit term that means “I bow to your spirit as a sign of respect; if only we in other faith traditions expressed the same kind of respect and love to each other, regardless of whom that person is or belongs.

In a Catholic context, this theory also applies, because we believe that the Holy Spirit rests in every created person because that person is sacred and God created each person (whether the person embraces that Spirit is another story). So often in our lives, we often negate that Spirit; we cancel it; we often disregard it because that person does not mesh with what we believe. We often forget that the real value of a person is the image and likeness of God from which the person was created, that same image and likeness that exists in us.

If we truly embraced that image and likeness, then we understand the gift of wisdom, the gift of oil that lights our lamps. The problem in this world is our oil lamps seemingly are always dry. We are not ready to enter heaven because we get so focused on the things of life that do

not amount to a hill of beans in the world of faith and we are not prepared for what lies ahead on the other side of life.

During the four weeks of Advent, I will offer those four online homilies I presented during those Marian visits through Europe as a way of saying how important that grace is to me and the people I serve... namely you. Please remember to do the same with each other. Please see the grace of God in others. Please listen to their stories and pray they listen to yours. Please realize that this grace from God constantly fills us and what we do with it determines what happens to us, according to Matthew 25. Please realize that the prayer attributed to St. Francis is right on target – it is in giving that we receive, in pardoning that we are pardoned and in dying that we are born to eternal life. If we understand that, then 1 Thessalonians makes all the sense in the world when we live that life of sacrifice, of suffering, of mercy, of faith, hope and God's love. Please know I will live this out for you. Please continue to do same for the people that you meet. This is our prayer.