Week 32 Ordinary Time - 2026

Wisdom 6:12-16; Psalm 62; Thess 4:13-14; Matt 25:1-13

St Gregory wrote of this Gospel that '*the kingdom of heaven is meant the present Church*.'[1] Which is to mean that we, inhabiting the Church Jesus established, live now in the kingdom of heaven. It is not heaven, but it belongs to the Kingdom. It is an inbreaking of heaven, like a military beachhead. St Gregory goes on to state that the 10 virgins represent the mix of the good and the bad members of the Church. The lamps of the virgins symbolise that they have received the Word of God, which have enlightened their lives. Commenting on this same passage, St Augustine recollects Jesus saying in Matthew 5:16, that his followers are to '*let you light shine before others, so that they may see your goods works and give glory to your Father*.'[2] St Hilary says: The lamps are the light of bright souls which shine forth in the sacrament of baptism.'[3] And so Sts Hilary and Augustine[4] see the lamps of the virgins as a representation of Baptism and the resulting good works of the members of the Church; however, those whose lamps have gone out represent those have allowed their faith to be extinguished and no longer live righteously. Life in God has withered. They are back living in darkness, and are excluded from heaven.

Gregory and Origin both believe that when the Gospel speaks of the virgins falling into sleep, the word 'sleep'[5] here means to die. The image of the Bridegroom coming at midnight is the unexpected hour of death but also the unexpected moment of Jesus' coming in judgement. It is also an Easter sign, of the Holy One Himself risen from the dead and bringing life.

And so, today's Gospel is not 'just' about being ready for Christ coming again, and being ready. It is about being ready for death and being prepared to come before Jesus with our lives as our testimony to our faith. Will we be illuminated by the Baptismal life we have led, or will Jesus not be able to see us in the darkness we chosen?

In this month of November, as we pray for the dead souls of those we have loved. as we pray for all the Christian dead, and as we pray for the dead of our wars, our thoughts should turn to our own deaths. Not in a self-absorbed or macabre way, but in a reflective way: If I died today, what would God see of me? Would he see a Baptismal life illuminated by Jesus, or would he perhaps see its absence?

Maybe you do not wish me to talk of this, but it is the absolute essence of our Christian life. It is the distilled truth of the Gospel: of Jesus coming into the world, of His fight against sin, against evil spirits, of His defence of his Father's holiness and of his own sacrifice for us, so that we can have eternal life.

I remember not so long ago talking to a person who could not face coming into the church because it was so filled with memories of his mother's funeral. He had entirely missed the point - or never heard it despite years of church attendance - that the whole story of our earthly life was to prepare for heaven. The whole point of the Mass is so that we can share in Jesus's death and Resurrection. The point of Baptism, the point

[1] St Greg in Thomas Aquinas, Catena Aurea, Matthew p844
[2] Matt 5:16
[3] In Catena Aurea, p 844-45
[4] The lamps which they carry in their hands are their works, of which it was said above, Let your works shine before me.
[5] Ibid 846-47

of Confession, the point of marriage, the point of Holy Orders, the point of everything is this. And yet he was, wrapped up in years of grief unable to step over the threshold of Hope. It was so sad.

St Paul writes very clearly about death:

'*We do not want you to be uninformed, brother and sister, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep'.*

Again, we hear the term falling 'asleep' which means to 'die'. Paul does not say 'do not grieve' when faced with death; he tells us 'not to grieve as those who have no hope'. That grief is the grief of despair. Instead, he wants us to cultivate a yearning for heaven, and to seek it wisely. We do this by cherishing life, acknowledging the path to death, and honouring God. That is enough, because we have been given all the tools we need for the task as members of His Church. And so, our lamps remain lit and we wait for Him to open the door. This is the month of the Holy Souls, and we are filled with Hope.