Our Gospel today is a familiar one…it contains an image that we all understand clearly references the second coming of the Lord. We know that we have to be ready…we're aware that we won't have much warning when the time comes. This much is fairly obvious…our lives are somewhat precarious. None of us are owed tomorrow; so we can't really afford to squander our time. This is the overarching message our Lord is trying to convey. There is, however, a feature of this particular parable that's easy to gloss over in light of the larger theme. Notice how the prudent virgins in this analogy were those who had ***done the work necessary*** to ensure their readiness when the bridegroom arrived. If these women had not put in the effort to buy and carry with them the extra oil, then they would not have been the exemplars of virtue we see them as today. They had more than the simple knowledge *that* they needed to be prepared…they actually knew *what they needed to do* in order to be prepared.

This realisation should cause us to ask the question of ourselves - what are we doing in order to prepare for the coming of the Bridegroom?

Have we put in the work necessary to prepare ourselves spiritually for the end of our lives? Is this even something we think about with any regularity, or have we done our best to avoid such an uncomfortable topic? None of us like to think of our own demise, but awareness of our mortality is absolutely necessary for our preparation. Without facing the certainty of our death, we lack the requisite motivation to do what needs to be done. We likely have many notions of what we need to work on before we can meet our maker in peace. Perhaps we think of the many ways in which we are deficient in our various vocations…maybe we consider our various attachments to sin and our need to root out these things from our lives…or maybe we look at our progress in virtue and consider how we might continue to grow in holiness. All of these are valid concerns that we should be actively working on, but they're not the most important metric. Consider the Bridegroom's response to the unwise virgins when they try to gain entry to the wedding feast: ***"Amen, I say to you, I do not know you."*** Jesus' most damning accusation is summarised in these ten words. The greatest misstep we can make in

preparing for our inevitable meeting with God is in our failure to grow in relationship with Him.

This makes perfect sense in light of the meaning of our existence. God does not depend on us. We add nothing to His being. He created us as an act of pure love, so that we could know, love and serve Him. These three things…the universal purpose of mankind…are all intended to draw us deeper into relationship with our Heavenly Father. What exactly does this look like in reality? What are some characteristics of the person who is in a deep personal relationship with Jesus? The person who is intimately involved with the Lord *speaks to Him, listens to Him, and acts on His word.*

Speaking to God tends to be the easiest of the three for us to do. We're quite good at speaking about ourselves. We can't tell the Lord anything He doesn't already know, but the simple act of opening our hearts to Him conditions us to vulnerability, which is essential to a deep and abiding relationship. This vulnerability serves to remind us of our

place in the cosmic order…it cements in our consciousness the reality that we depend on God for everything.

Listening to God takes much more effort, and a certain commitment of time. We only get good at hearing God's voice with practice. This kind of listening requires the embrace of silence…we have to shut out all distractions, and devote ourselves entirely to hearing our Father's words in our heart. Listening is often achieved through meditation on Scripture, which necessitates time spent in contemplation. The effort we put into listening to God's voice is directly correlated to our desire to love Him. Like in any of our other relationships, time is the currency of love. If we love the Lord, then we must be willing to spend time with Him…if we're not making such an effort, then we inevitably sink our time into some inferior imitation of the relationship we all crave at our core, all the while wondering why we aren't progressing in our spiritual life. Here, the words of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane ring most true - ***"...could you not wait one hour with me? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the***

spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." God gives us so much time, and yet we're stingy with that gift when it comes to giving back to Him. No investment we could ever make would have the potential of paying dividends like time spent listening to the voice of God in our hearts.

Acting on God's word is the most critical step in growing our relationship with the Almighty. The tree is known by its fruit. Those who say they love Jesus *may* be telling the truth…those who work hard to carry out His will *prove it*. ***"If you love me, keep my commandments."*** This step in the process is difficult for us, because it requires great trust. Generally speaking, we like being in charge. We're much more comfortable living out the delusion that we're in control of our lives. Focusing on and carrying out God's will means that we have to first put aside our own will. We have to surrender…we have to forego what we think will make us happy in the short term, for what we know will make us happy in the long term. The wise virgins spent a little more money on their oil then the imprudent virgins…they took a

little more time out of their day before the wedding…they worked a bit harder carrying the extra oil to the nuptial celebration…all of these things would have seemed less appealing at first, but when their work was rewarded in the end, they would have been very glad they put in the extra effort up front. This is what we do when we prioritise what God wants over what we want, which leads to a much deeper and more robust relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Speak to God…listen to God…and act on His will. If we do these three things consistently, we will come to know Him as He wants us to know Him. This is the best preparation we can make for the final judgement. Our liturgical year is coming to a close. The Church, in her wisdom, uses this time to remind us that there is some finality attached to what we do in this life…that our decisions here have eternal consequences. Don't squander this reminder. Do what you can to deepen your relationship with the Lord today, that His warning will not have fallen on deaf ears; ***"Amen I say to you…stay awake; for you***

know neither the day, nor the hour." In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!

My dear brothers and sisters, I have a little announcement that I would like to share with you concerning the celebration of Holy Mass here at St. Joseph.

Beginning with the Solemnity of Christ the King - which falls at the end of this month - we will begin celebrating Mass *ad orientem*, which is a Latin expression meaning "toward the East." Practically speaking, this means that the priest and the congregation will face the same direction during the Eucharistic Prayer, together directing our attention toward the Lord, whose coming we await. It's a watchful and anticipatory posture that reflects the reality we recognize taking place in Mass…that the priest, *in persona Christi capitis*, (in the person of Christ the head), leads his people as they present to God the Father their one sacrifice of praise.

This practice has deep roots in the ancient tradition of our Faith, and it offers a beautiful expression of something fundamental to our understanding of the Mass: that we are not gathered here in this church to face one another, but to turn our hearts and minds together toward Christ.

This is not being done in the spirit of Antiquarianism…it's not a desire to bring back something that was set aside intentionally by the Church. In fact, the current Missal still contains instructions for the priest that presuppose the *Ad Orientem* posture remains in use. I'm choosing to make this change for the same reason that I make any change to the Mass - that we may have the most beautiful and faithful celebration of the Lord's Supper possible for us here at this wonderful parish. Implementing this change is very much in keeping with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, which called us to a deeper understanding and more faithful celebration of the sacred liturgy.

I realize that this may be a little unfamiliar to some, but I hope you will receive it with open hearts and joyful anticipation. Nothing about

the substance of the Mass is changing. Rather, we are embracing a beautiful expression of the worship that has been handed down to us through the centuries.

I am excited about this next step in the life of our parish, and I hope you will be as well. Let us continue to grow together in our love for the Holy Mass, and above all, in our love for Our Lord, who asks us to be faithful to the commands of His bride, the Church. Amen!