

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Wisdom 6:12-16 / Matthew 25:1-13)
08.11.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

The parable of the ten bridesmaids helps us to decipher the signs of the coming of the kingdom of God in our lives here and now.

In this parable, it is question of a wedding. A wedding evokes the intimate relationship between bride and bridegroom. Christ is the bridegroom, the Church is the bride. As members of the Church, we are the bride. A wedding also involves bridesmaids and others who are invited to the wedding feast.

In this parable, it is also question of lamps and of oil. With a lamp we are given light to see in the darkness of the night. The oil keeps the lamp lit. So if we have enough oil we will see throughout the whole night. The oil is a symbol of the watchfulness which should be ours.

The message of this parable is a call for us to remain alert, to stay awake, to keep watch throughout the whole of our lifetime, waiting for the coming of the Lord and the establishment of his kingdom. To stay awake is not easy. We know from experience that we have a natural tendency to fall asleep. We can forget that we are waiting for someone, we can lose sight of the coming of Christ and his kingdom.

When the parable invites us to remain alert and stay awake, it is not talking about natural sleep. The proof is that all the bridesmaids fell asleep for a time, both the sensible ones and those who were foolish. As always in the parables of Jesus, the words used have different levels of meaning. Here it is question of an invitation to remain watchful at the level of our heart. The heart is the deepest level or the centre, the very core of our being, the place where the three persons of the Holy Trinity dwell within us. Our heart is the place where, in the presence of God, we make our life choices and take our decisions. Our heart is the place where we can experience the intimate presence of God in the three persons of the Holy Trinity who are in a continual loving and respectful relationship with one another within us. Our heart is the place where Jesus, the Son, is always praying to his Father: "Abba-Father". The Spirit invites us to unite with Jesus' prayer and to make it our own, following the rhythm of our breathing: "Abba-Father". Our heart is the place where we hear the Father assuring us in a very personal way, whispering to us over and over again: You are my beloved child.

The truth is that we are rarely truly awakened and fully alive at the level of our hearts. So often, we keep our nose stuck on the window pane of our heart, looking everywhere and anywhere but at the heart of the matter. So often we are stationed at the door post of our hearts, distracted by all that is passing by, speaking to everybody and anybody. All the while, the Lord awaits our attention deep within our hearts. I can't resist quoting the well-known phrase of St Augustine: "Late I have loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me and I was not with you. The

lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all”.

We must wait for the coming of the kingdom deep within us. It is there that God abides. This indwelling is intimate love. It is experienced through personal prayer. But there is another dimension to our expectation of the kingdom, a communal dimension. We are waiting for the kingdom in communion with all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

Let us return to the parable. Have you noticed the cry of the foolish ones at the end of the parable: “Lord, Lord, open the door for us. But he replied: I tell you solemnly, I do not know you.” These verses echo another passage of Matthew’s gospel (Mt 7:21): “It is not anyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven”. In each case, you have the double exclamation: “Lord, Lord” and a similar reply from the Lord: “I have never known you... I do not know you”. The message is clear: To enter into the Kingdom of heaven, words or intentions are not enough; actions are necessary. As the proverb puts it: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions”.

Let us take two examples: It is one thing to lament, to talk about and express wordy compassion for the elderly or the lonely who suffer from the present lockdown. It is something else to do at least a little something to help these people in one way or another.

Or again it is one thing to feel very sorry about what is happening in Africa when we hear about children who receive no education, children or adults who have no basic hygiene or health care, or the unemployed there who cannot provide for their loved ones; it is another thing to put our hand in our pockets in order to give at least a little something to open and run a school, a dispensary or a hospital, or to create an NGO which will permit adults to learn a job and earn their living and become their family breadwinner. It happens also that people gave a few weeks or a few months of their precious time and go to Africa or elsewhere to help with their hands, their mind and their heart their brothers and sisters in need.

God’s kingdom is coming. We have to wait for its coming in prayer. It is a gift from the Lord which needs to be received. But we have also to do all that we can to allow it to happen. God’s kingdom will not happen without our collaboration. I leave you with the well-known words of Teresa of Avila:

“Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hand with which he blesses all the world,
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hand, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours”.

Lord, may your kingdom come within us and through us!