

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Wisdom 6:12-16 / Matthew 25:1-13)
12.11.2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

The parable of the ten bridesmaids taking their lamps and going out to meet the bridegroom invites us to ask ourselves: where are we? What are we doing? Where are we going? I suggest that we are in a kind of in-between place, relying on the past and hoping in the future. Let me explain.

We rely on our faith in God who created us out of love. The consequence is that our life is God's gift, God's gift that we have to receive and to respect.

God sent his Son among us to reveal his love to us. His Son suffered his passion and died on the Cross for our reconciliation with the Father and the forgiveness of our sins. He rose from the dead and promised to give us a share in his resurrection, in his victory over death. In other words, through Christ Jesus, we are set free from the slavery of sin, the weight of guilt and shame, and the fear of death.

Before his Ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus promised to be with us always.

This is our faith in God's love for us on which we rely.

As we go through life, we await the Lord's return at the end of time.

We also await the Lord's coming at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, when he will call us to be with him for ever.

And, at the same time, we await the Lord's unceasing and multifaceted visits in our daily lives here and now. We could say that we go through the whole of life waiting for the Lord with hope.

At present, we journey in an in-between space, confident that the Lord loves us and is faithful to his promise to be with us always. The problem is that we are not always with him.

We wait for the Lord, or we should be doing so. At this point, it is interesting to note how today's gospel passage invites us "to stay awake, because, we don't know either the day or the hour of the coming of the Lord". If the Scriptures invite us to stay awake, this is because we have a tendency to go through life drowsy, asleep or at least half-asleep. What does it mean to go through life asleep or half asleep? What does it mean to stay awake as we go through life?

In the first degree of humility of his Rule for monks, St Benedict exhorts us "to keep the fear of God always before our eyes and never forget it. We must constantly remember everything God has commanded us". The term 'the fear of God' in the Bible and in the Rule of St Benedict means to have an infinite respect for the presence of the Lord. To stay awake is to go through life aware of the presence of God by our side; it means to never forget him. To be asleep or half asleep is to go through life alone, to go through life in an 'I, me and myself' mode, instead of doing so with the Lord, who is always faithful to his covenant of love with his people of which each one of us is a member. The Lord is present to us in so many ways. With the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ Jesus dwells in our hearts. The Lord speaks to us through his Word, through the members of his body the Church, through the sacraments, through all our brothers and sisters in humanity, all of whom were created in the image and resemblance of God. He is also present

to us through the beauty of creation. To stay awake or to fall asleep means to live aware of God's presence by our side or to forget him, or to fail to see Him.

Another way of going through life half asleep and not fully awake is to be so absorbed in what we do that we forget for whom we are doing it all and with whom we are doing it. It is to forget where we are going. And so, we go through life asleep or half asleep, when we are a workaholic for example, when one dimension of our life (work) takes the place of other vital dimensions of our existence (spiritual life, family, social life, leisure). It is never good when one thing hinders us from remembering the end of all things!

Another way of going through life asleep is when we neglect personal prayer time with the Lord. Prayer is a privileged way of expressing the moment when we are in a personal relationship with the Lord. It is the moment when the Lord shows us the way forward for our lives. Prayer is the moment when we can reflect on our life and its meaning. In prayer we are with the Lord who helps us live our lives to the full. So, let us not be afraid to stay awake in prayer, waiting for the coming of the Lord.

Our vocation is to seek the Lord, to seek his face. It is to yearn for him, and having found Him to continue to seek him. The call to seek the Lord is an invitation to wait for the Lord actively, with all our heart and all our will, and not just to follow the tide. When we are no longer seeking the Lord actively, very quickly we lose a sense of direction and go adrift.

Let us come back to the parable: five bridesmaids took their lamps but forgot to bring oil; five other bridesmaids took their lamps with flasks of oil. We might ask ourselves what is the meaning of the oil in the parable. A lot of suggestions have been made. The oil has been identified with good works, with faith, with love or almost any of the Christian virtues. Tom Wright proposes "that oil simply means being ready for the key moment. What matters is being ready, being prepared, being wise, thinking ahead, realizing that a crisis is coming sooner or later". We know that a crisis is an opportunity that we should not miss. The oil is our active waiting for the Lord, our active seeking of the Lord's face.

Dear brothers and sisters, what is our desire? Are we inhabited by lots of petty desires? Or are we inhabited by a unique desire to see and welcome the Lord's coming, the desire to know the Lord's will and to do it? What is our priority in life? We are all walking towards death. None of us can escape this human destiny. The best way to be ready when the Lord will come and call us to be with himself is to be ready here and now. It is to welcome the Lord who does not cease to come and visit us in every circumstance of life.

Lord, rekindle our desire to welcome you here and now, and each day of our lives!