

# 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Year

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In two weeks' time the Church's liturgical year draws to a close with the Feast of the Kingship of Christ – a theme that leads naturally into Advent and the second coming. This is why the three parables of Jesus' final addresses in Matthew's Gospel are very appropriate. They all have to do with readiness. The three stories relate three different kinds of accountability required of Christians as they prepare for their glorious encounter with Christ. The first of the three parables tells the story of the servant who is left in charge of the household. Today Jesus tells the story of the wise and foolish virgins and next week we will hear the third parable of this final section: the well-known story of the talents.

The Jesus begins with the high point of the wedding ceremony when the groom, accompanied by his relatives, go to the family house of the bride to bring her to his home. Ten young women, very likely the groom's sisters and female cousins, are awaiting his return. Whereas some translate the 10 as "bridesmaids," this may not be the best translation. It is more like young girls who will one day be married! Five are clever young girls and five are not the brightest!

When the bridegroom comes at midnight, they all rise to light their lamps; but only five who have thought ahead and bought sufficient oil are able to do so. The five without oil beg to borrow from the others, but the wise ones are unwilling to give up their resources because then none of the 10 will have enough oil. While the five foolish ones are off buying more oil, the bridegroom arrives and is ushered into the marriage feast, and the door is bolted shut. The clever young girls are prepared for their roles, but the unprepared and dull-witted girls fail to make adequate plans and find themselves closed out of the feast.

The lesson to be learned is "watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The foolish young girls were not ready when the great moment finally arrived. Commitment needs practical application. My mother had the saying, "Fine words butter no parsnips"! For Matthew, being watchful means being ready at all times, whether waking or sleeping. This parable refers to ordinary people not just the apostles. Every person who loves Jesus must persevere in whatever they are called to do until Jesus comes, no matter how great is the delay of that coming. Those who endure to the end will be saved. Readiness means forethought and preparation as well as staying awake. If we want to be ready for the unexpected we need to have contingency plans. We need to be attuned to the possibility so that our spiritual training kicks in automatically like any emergency procedure. If we want to be ready to meet the Lord when he comes at the end of our lives we must have the vision to recognise his presence with us every day in the people we meet and the circumstances of everyday life.

How often do we have our lamps with us, but no oil to burn in them? Saint Teresa of Calcutta spoke about this:

"What are the oil lamps in our lives?  
They are the little everyday things:  
faithfulness, punctuality, kind words,  
thoughtfulness of another person,  
the way we are silent at times,  
the way we look at things,  
the way we speak, the way we act.  
Those are the little drops of love  
which make it possible for our life of faith to shine brightly."