

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Be Prepared! Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Readings: Wis 6:12-16; Responsorial Psalm PS 63:2-8; 1 THES 4:13-18; Gospel MT 25:1-13

The parable of the wise and foolish young women is pretty clear – we need to be prepared for when the Lord comes, because we do not know the hour or the day. The background to this story is very interesting. Ancient Jewish marriage actually took place in three stages over a period of time. The couple might be engaged as children and when they got older there was a betrothal ceremony held at the bride's house. The couple exchanged vows and the groom gave the bride presents. This period lasted for a year or two, but the bride continued to live at home with her parents. This put the couple in a special category which was “betrothed.”



When they were ready, they had a marriage supper which usually took place at night. The groom and his parents and friends came to the bride's house and then her friends and family along with the groom's went to his house or a large hall where a contract was signed and the festivities would take place.

In this particular story, the ten young women were probably already at the hall where the bridegroom was bringing his bride. It was nighttime and they all had lamps with oil in them, and the lamps were burning brightly so that he would see that everyone was assembled. They waited a long time for the wedding party and began to get drowsy, and one by one they fell asleep.

They woke up with a start when someone began calling, "Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." They rushed up, but some of the lamps began going out. Five of the young women wisely planned ahead for the delay and carried extra oil for their lamps. Five foolish ones had no extra oil and they wanted to borrow some from the wise ones, but they refused because there might not be enough for all of them to light the way. They urged them to go and buy some oil and they left to go find a merchant who might be open late at night.

While they were gone, the bridegroom arrived and the five wise ones and the rest of the wedding party went inside. The door was shut to begin the ceremony and festivities. When the five foolish ones came back, they shouted for someone to open the door for them but there was no way for them to enter. The bridegroom refused them saying, "I tell you the truth. I don't know you."

Jesus gives us a pretty clear message - be prepared to live our lives in such a way that we are always ready to see and hear the Lord in our everyday activities as well as prepare for the coming of the Lord at the end of our days.

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Reflection: What is your preparation plan? What will you do to listen more intently to God this week?

Art by Julie Lonneman