

Thirty-Second Sunday in OT A2020

The readings of this Sunday talk about eternal life. They show what will happen to us when that final day will come. They invite us to be prepared, for we do not know when the Lord will come back.

The first reading is a reflection on the virtue of wisdom. It compares wisdom to a young and beautiful lady ready to give herself to those who are looking and waiting for her. It also shows the benefit that comes out of possession of wisdom, as those who have it will be prudent in their conduct and carefree in his undertaking.

What is behind this text is the idea that wisdom is important for the conduct of human affairs. There is also the idea that wisdom is accessible to those who look for it. The last idea is related to the truth that wisdom transforms those who possess it.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the parable of ten virgins. First all, the Gospel starts with Jesus comparing the Kingdom of God to ten virgins, of whom five were wise and other five were foolish.

Then, it enters into details by showing that as all were invited to the wedding feast, the wise took their lamps with some reserve of oil while the foolish ones did not. The Gospel shows also that, as the bridegroom was delayed, they all fell asleep.

After that, the Gospel talks about the announcement of the bridegroom in the middle of the night where the wise were ready to welcome him while the foolish went to buy some oil for their lamps that were going out. The Gospel ends with the return of the foolish virgins who could not enter because the wedding hall was locked and the bridegroom did not recognize them.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about preparedness for eternal life. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. First, I want to tell you a history and from it I will enter deep into the Gospel. When I traveled to Europe for the first time, I found myself in Germany, precisely in Munich. I was struck by the planning I saw in the train station. Everything was planned about the arrival and the departure of the trains.

That planning was the symbol of the way people lead their lives. Nothing is done at random. Everything is planned to the point that if you want to meet someone, you have to make an appointment or to be scheduled.

For sure, there is nothing wrong with all that and planning has to be encouraged more and more. However, while people are so keen on planning the things of this world, little is done when it is about planning for eternal life.

As a matter of fact, we often forget that this world passes and we alike. We often live as though nothing is happening around us. We live as though the world was eternal. We act as though we did not hear the word of Jesus and his continual call to conversion. And yet, we have to be prepared and be ready. As Jesus says, "Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour".

These words of Jesus have a sense of urgency. They are a warning to each of us not to be indifferent. If in this world, people have multiple plans just in case something goes bad, how much more shall we be prepared? If Jesus would come back today, what would be your plan of rescue?

When I was in the Congo, I once asked some of my students: If today you hear it is the end of the world and Jesus is about to come, what would you do? One responded that he would run and go to a church so that he finds him there. I think he was wrong because he would not have time to get there. A second said that he would just kneel where he was and start praying. I believe that one made sense to me because there will not be time to run.

Because of that urgency, we have to act now and not to delay for tomorrow what we can do today for our eternal salvation. Who knows if the opportunity we lose today will come our way again? This is a serious business. There is a tendency to always say: "I still have time", "I am still young", "I will do it", "There is no need of rushing things", etc. This happens very often with the young people and those who are still in good health. But, how do you know that you will really have time tomorrow or after tomorrow?

Of course it is always wise to take time, to analyze and reflect before making a decision, especially when it is about an important matter. However, what is good in our social life and business might not be helpful for our spiritual life. That is why it is important to understand that we are accountable and responsible for our eternal life.

It is striking and even shocking to realize that the wise virgins who brought some reserve of oil with them did not want to share with those who were in need and, thereby, in critical condition.

This episode is not intended to teach us selfishness as though it was a virtue. The point, on the contrary, is to remind us that we are accountable for our life and our acts. Negligence on our part will never be compensated by the goodness of others when it is about our eternal life. That is why it is impossible to claim salvation out of the merits of our ancestors or our families. We are all responsible for our salvation or our perdition. We should assume the consequence of our acts, good or bad.

In that perspective, the oil that the wise virgins brought and the foolish ones did not bring symbolizes the good acts we have to produce while we are still in this time of the awaiting of the Lord. This time of the awaiting of the Lord should be put to good use so that when the Lord comes back he might find us ready and well prepared to welcome him.

The symbol of oil reminds us also that our acts on earth will follow us in the other world. If we have the good ones, they will stay with us and allow us to be accepted in God's kingdom. If we have none, it will be problematic for us because we would have nothing to claim or something to hang onto in order to be accepted in God's kingdom.

In this time of waiting, let us not sleep, but be awake and prepared so that whenever the Lord comes we might share with him the banquet in his kingdom. Let us ask Jesus to give us the courage to produce good acts while we are still on earth so that they might serve us in the world to come. God bless you all!

Wisdom 6: 12-16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13



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