

Thirty-Second Sunday in OT A2023

I want to start this homily with an anecdote. When I traveled to Europe for the first time, I visited Germany, especially the city of Munich. With a priest, friend of mine, we went to the Central Train Station for a promenade. As we were there, I was really struck by the planning I saw in the train station. Everything was planned about the arrival and the departure of the trains that nothing was left at random. A simple delay was object of complain from the travelers and apologies from the Train Company.

Beyond that admiration, I came to realize that planning is an expression of how people live. It was not particular to Germans, but there was an inner impulse in each one of us that pushes people to think ahead about tomorrow and after tomorrow. Many plan in advance any activity in which they will be involved. Many do not want to be surprised by anything they did not expect and for which they were not prepared.

For sure, there is nothing wrong with planning or organizing our lives. These things have even to be encouraged more and more. However, while people are so keen on planning ahead about the things of this world, little is done when it is about planning for eternal life.

The whole stakes of today's parable is about planning and preparation. Before deepening that idea, it is important to understand that all the ten virgins are going out to meet the bridegroom. The symbolism that the parable contains is the expectation of the Lord's return and our encounter with him. Such a perspective helps us ask the question: Who are we and where are we going?

The Scriptures affirms that we are travelers and pilgrims. St Peter calls it, "Aliens and sojourners" (1 Peter 2:11); St John says, "We are in this world, but not of this world" (John 17: 11, 14-15). If we are pilgrims-travelers, it means that we fundamentally are on our way to the encounter with the Lord. Therefore the world in which we live is not our true home. We are living in the expectation of the Lord's return. We have to orient our lives in view of that encounter with the Lord.

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 our Lord and his continual call to repentance. 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 get sleepy. If in this world, people have multiple plans just in case something goes wrong, how much more shall we be prepared for our eternal? If Jesus would come back today, what would be your plan of rescue?

When I was in the Congo, I once asked some 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 even have the time to get there. Another 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 problem. 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 the problems 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 eternal salvation. Let us not run the risk of being surprised by our indecisions and attempts to delay things.

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 of our Lord 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. It is impossible to claim salvation out of the merits of our ancestors or our families. We are all accountable and 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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