

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

REFLECTION 1:

THE UNPREPARED

As the current liturgical year draws to a close, our Gospel readings for the next three Sundays will focus on the end of the age. If we look at the Gospel parable for today (Matt. 25:1-13) it may sound like a fictional account of a wedding reception. In fact it is true in some aspects to the reality of a Jewish marriage ceremony even to the present day. The celebrations began in the evening. The families and guests formed a procession to accompany the couple from the bride's family home to her new home with her husband's family. As they drew near, the women folk of the groom's family formed a torchlit procession of welcome. In the parable, ten girls were to form this procession but only five of them had thought of bringing oil, so the procession will hardly be a success – then the wedding suffers another setback: there is an unexpected delay in getting proceedings underway – the girls have got tired of waiting and fallen asleep. Suddenly towards midnight, word comes that the procession is on its way. There is a frantic rush of activity as the girls form their procession, only to discover that half the lamps will not light. Five girls have run out of oil and to borrow from the other five would put the whole event in jeopardy. The procession could be plunged into darkness within a few minutes. They go off in search of a supply of oil, an unlikely prospect so late at night. As the five go off shopping, the wedding feast gets underway, the groom has arrived and the door closed firmly. The girls return late, they knock, but the groom refuses to open the door, saying he does not know them. This seems unlikely and even a little unfair. Their laziness may have risked ruining the wedding but they were relatives, after all, and perhaps not too experienced in this sort of thing.

Like so many parables Jesus told this one has a wider and universal meaning. In the historical situation, the parable was directed against the Jews. They were the chosen people and their whole history should have been a preparation for the coming of the Son of God and they ought to have been prepared for him when he came. Instead they were quite unprepared and therefore they were shut out. Here in dramatic form is the tragedy of the unpreparedness of the Hebrew people.

But this parable has a meaning for us as well, It warns that there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute. It is, for example, too late to acquire a skill, when some task has been offered to us to be carried out. In the same way, it is easy to leave things so late that we can no longer prepare ourselves to meet with God. The parable also warns us that there are certain things that cannot be borrowed. We cannot borrow a relationship with God. We must possess it for ourselves. That time is now; there is no point in waiting until the bridegroom is at the door. The 'oil for the lamps' is a symbol of the good works the Messiah expects to find at his coming. If he does not find it, all he can say is 'I do not know you'.