

Thirtieth-second Sunday of Ordinary Time A - Be prepared for the Bridegroom
November 8, 2020.

In the Gospel reading (Matthew 25:1-13) Jesus tells about **The parable of the ten bridesmaids, five who are wise and five who are foolish. It is not so much about bridesmaids as it is about us who are waiting for the bridegroom.**

The parable tickles my memory of the 1971 awards winning film **Fiddler on the Roof** which is about the father of five daughters, and his attempts to maintain his Jewish traditions. He must cope with the strong-willed actions of his three older daughters who wish to marry for love – each one's choice of a husband moves further away from the customs of his Jewish faith and marriage practices: parents arranged marriage. In the traditional Jewish way, there are two stages to get married: the first is the betrothal when representatives from both families get together and decide if the other's son or daughter would be a good choice for their child and their family. If they agree, a dowry is set, a marriage contract is signed, and the couple is legally married. But the couple doesn't live together yet. They will remain betrothed for a year or two. In *Matthew 1:18-25* Mary was at this stage. She was betrothed, legally married to Joseph, but not yet living with him. After the betrothal period, stage two of the marriage takes place: the wedding celebration. The bridegroom will go to the bride's father's house and make the final arrangements, perhaps bringing whatever part of the dowry he still owes. Then he escorts the bride from her house to his house. This joyful procession will be led by maidens carrying lamps. The bride and groom would come next, followed by members of both their families. Neighbours will stand at their doors cheering the young couple. Once the procession gets to the groom's house, the wedding feast begins. The party could last several days. From that point on the couple lives together as husband and wife.

Jesus' parable has a deeper meaning than the "have or have not". The parable uses the story of the bridesmaids to help us ask ourselves, **"Am I ready for the bridegroom to come?"** If Jesus were to come today, would we be ready and prepared for him? Everything changes around us: the seasons, weather patterns, the economy, the political scene. The only thing that does not change is the certainty of our death. We do not know when but the appointment cannot be cancelled. Are we prepared for it? We definitely want our spiritual lamps to be filled with oil, otherwise the result will be a disaster. We know that our God is merciful. But we cannot presume he will be merciful if we have ignored the many opportunities he has given us to trim our lamps, to serve Him, to cultivate a personal relationship with Him which one must possess, work at and live because it cannot be borrowed at the last minute.

Scouts and Girl Guides have a motto: **Be Prepared.** On May 1, 2016, a wildfire began southwest of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. On May 3, it swept through the community, forcing the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history. On May 3 at 5:00 p.m. the full evacuation of the city was announced on radio. We seldom listen to the radio. Our neighbour rang our door bell and told us to get ready. My wife panicked. The gas tank in our car was almost empty. Immediately she drove the car to the gas station nearby. The lineup was a few km long. She drove back without filling so I would not be left alone for long. Thanks be to God, our daughter came, loaded a few of my essential medical supplies and our photo IDs into her van and off we went. By the time we got to the main road, we could see the heavy smoke and fire miles away. Since then my wife fills the car with gas when the tank is half empty. Two months ago, with the advice from the kids, Philomena registered me with the city Vulnerable Person Registry. They gave us a special phone number to call in case of emergency and they call us regularly to make sure everything is OK. Last week, they even gave us a backpack filled

with emergency supplies: Flashlight, radio, blankets, poncho, gloves, first aid kit, collapsable water container, masks, duct tape, 40 hours candle, etc. to get us prepared for emergency.

Most people are busy with their lives, especially with Christmas approaching now. But do we do the one thing we need to do? **Do we prepare our lives, our family and our world for the Lord?** How many times people say, "I couldn't get to Mass this week because there was a soccer match or something on Sunday morning." But does one think of changing the schedule? There are so many masses offered on Saturday and Sunday. There must be a time that can fit into the schedule of the weekend or one just does not want to be bothered? Even at this pandemic time, there are masses offered online and we can receive spiritual communion to be united with our Lord. And, it is not just Sunday we think of the Lord. We have to develop a calm and believing attitude as we go about our normal days of work. Spend time with Jesus, share with him our thoughts, plans and worries, ask him for guidance. Jesus is always prepared to meet us and he does not give us an appointment but comes as he will into our lives if we are open to him.

For the Catholics, the month of November has long been a time to put things into perspective. It's the month when the liturgy reminds us that our Lord will come again, and that this life is not all that there is. The wisdom and peace of mind that come from reflecting on these truths, in the light of Christ's love, are incalculable. But we have to put forth the effort to make that reflection. We have to take time to contemplate the changing natural season, or visit the graves of loved ones, or spend more time with the sick and the dying, or read about the past history of salvation and God's plan for the future. **The parable of the ten bridesmaids is placed at the end of the *Gospel of Matthew* to warn us to make the best use of the time we are given to serve the Lord. It tells us that God has a banquet of love waiting for us in heaven, but we have to be prepared to enter the banquet.** Let's promise our Lord that we will do something concrete to make this month different, to put our personal life in harmony with the Church's deep meditation on the Last Things. We are not to take the chance of going through life relying on the minimum of holiness. **When the call comes, what will count are the qualities of character we have developed, not the riches we possess or the fortune we have gathered. It is not how long but how well we lived. Staying awake must be the axis around which our whole being and life rotate.**