

31st Sunday Ordinary Time Year
November 11-12, 2017
Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

I was warned more than once by my dutiful parents when handed the car keys for the first time. “Be careful– obey the rules on the road, and no matter what, never, ever run out of gas.” I was told that this was one of the unforgivable offense in driving because it was completely avoidable.

Running out of gas with the result of poor planning, plain and simple. I would later temp to beg to differ when I was driving my grandmother’s car after her stroke. Her gas gauge was different – empty meant really empty – not, you have a couple of gallons left, better fill up soon. I learned my lesson well – there is no excuse.

Being prepared is part and parcel of life; we do it to the best of our ability – but sometimes there is simply no excuse for being ill-prepared. The preparation spoken of in today’s Gospel is of the spiritual kind, yet principle remains much the same.

Are we prepared to meet the Lord if he called us home right now? Do we even dare think such things? We are given a stern warning – you know neither the day nor the hour. Can we afford to put off until tomorrow what needs to be done today?¹

Yes, we know that it is vital to live our lives in the present, and not in some dream world in the future. It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we would be better off at some other point in our lives. This thinking is dangerous, and should be avoided at all costs. We live in the present. this is our time. God has placed us here. What is so insidious about that mindset, is that we will never really appreciate that the purpose of our life on earth is to prepare for life in heaven with Almighty God.

¹ It recalls the story of the student who wryly remarked on missing homework at the beginning of the school year – “Well, the sooner I get behind, the more time I have to catch up!” No amount of rationalizing helps.

In our first reading from the book of Wisdom, the author is reflecting on the glory of wisdom, the perfection of prudence. If we keep vigil for her, we will not be let down. Saint Paul says in our second reading today that those who have died in Christ will rise first. From then on, we will be with the Lord unceasingly.

This in no way implies that our accomplishments are meaningless. When we perform virtuous actions, they acquire merit through Jesus Christ. We are rewarded graciously by God for what we do in Christ. So where is the balance in life? How do we know if we are acting like the foolish bridesmaids as opposed to the sensible ones?

Consider these simple questions. Do you pray to God each day of, or only when it seems convenient? If you find yourself watching two hours of television per night, wondering why you do not have enough time for prayer, what is that telling you? How do you balance a three-hour Viking's game versus a one-hour Sunday Mass?

Next, how do you handle pressure in life? When things get difficult at school or at home or at work, what is your response to this pressure? Many people bear down and dig in their heels, working late hours burning the proverbial midnight oil.

However especially in these times we can forget the bigger picture. We are only living for the moment, concerned with the "daily grind." Today's parable invites us to see our entire lives as a pilgrimage. We are on our way to the Lord, and we can no longer put off our spiritual life.

Too many effectively say to themselves, "I will take God seriously later when I'm in adult. I'll take these matters more seriously once I get settled into my career or make partner in the firm, or when the mortgage is paid off. I'll have plenty of time for God when I retire; I have all the time in the world." Excuses are legion.

But what makes you so sure that even then, you'll still have the desire? You just spent your life making excuses, and what will your excuse be now? The foolish bridesmaids were not intellectually challenged. Foolish people lack for thought and caution. They have little regard for what makes sense, for that which is tried-and-true.

The foolish person doesn't care about tomorrow, because it may detract from today. The wise person on the other hand, is the perfection of prudence. The person who keeps vigil for wisdom shall be free from care, our first reading notes.

Let us pray for the grace to keep an eye on the world beyond, so we will always keep the things of the world in perspective. It is a fact that we know neither the day nor the hour. If our eyes are not open to the infinite possibilities that our faith offers, that faith provides, we will simply put a lid on the grace of God.

No, we need to ensure that we are not acting as a filter, obscuring the works of God from penetrating through to others. Rather, we seek wisdom in order to open ourselves to the fullness of life that God truly seeks and desires for each one of us.