

HOMILY ~ 32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME NOVEMBER 11/12, 2023

We are coming to the end of the Church year, so the readings are all about the end of the world or our own death. We do not like thinking about death or talking about death, do we? We know intellectually that we are all going to die; but unless we are experiencing a terminal illness, we do not really believe that it will happen any time soon. Because of my ministry, I am dealing with death every day. One of the things that struck me over the last couple of months is the number of sudden deaths I have experienced, deaths that were not expected. We really need to be prepared all of the time. I think we need to talk about death, but we do not have to be preoccupied with it. I think this means that we have to live our lives remembering what is really important, then we will be prepared. We tend to be focused on what we produce and all of the many activities we accomplish every day. Living a good life is not about what we produce, it is about who we become.

In the Gospel Reading, we hear a parable, which is a story told to make a spiritual or moral point. In this parable, we encounter ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom to return so they could welcome him and light his way with lamps to proceed to the wedding banquet. Five are wise and prepared, Five are not. Jesus is the bridegroom that they are waiting for. The bridesmaids that are not prepared have lamps, but no oil for their lamps. The oil represents grace. They do not have the grace that they need. They cannot get the oil that they need from the other bridesmaids, they must get it themselves, just as we must get grace for ourselves from God. These bridesmaids did not have to be hyper vigilant and they all fell asleep; but the wise bridesmaids fell asleep prepared. We do not have to be preoccupied with death. We need to focus upon living a good life. Then we will be prepared. How can we become one of the wise bridesmaids? How can we live a good life?

My first spiritual director 27 years ago told me something I will never forget. He told me that we tend to have a spirituality of sin or a spirituality of grace. A spirituality of sin is a focus upon the sinfulness, the devil and the evil in our lives. We will not find God there, because he is not there. We should have a healthy awareness of our sin and repenting for our sin, but we should not be preoccupied with it. If we have a

spirituality of grace, we look to the goodness in the world. That is where we will find God. We have some serious crises going on in our world today; and because of our negativity bias, our tendency to focus on negative information and news, that is what gets our attention and that is what the news media and social media focuses upon. These things are anomalies, not the norm. We need to be informed, and we need to know what is going on in the world; but we cannot get preoccupied with the sin, hatred, divisiveness, fear and anger. If we do, the driving energy in our lives will be sin, hatred, fear, divisiveness and anger. That just leads to more of the same. We need to look for the goodness in our world. There is goodness all around us, and that is where we will find God. We have so very much for which to be grateful. If we look for the goodness, the driving energy in our lives can then become love, which leads to more love. Most of us are not in a position where we can have a direct effect on the crises in our world, but we can have a direct effect on the world around us and the people in our lives.

How do become one of the wise bridesmaids? Wisdom is not just about intellectual or academic knowledge. It is not just about our individual accomplishments and experiences. It is about taking all of this information and discerning how it can lead to goodness in our lives today. This grace, this wisdom comes from God. We need to connect to God through our community prayer here at Mass every weekend. I get a tremendous amount of inspiration and hope just from being with this community. We also need regular personal prayer, and by that I mean just spending some quiet one on one time with the Lord. Every day I think we need to discern how God is calling us to love and serve others. We need to use our gifts or our charisms to serve other people. If you want to feel better, try doing something for someone else. It works every time. I came across this quote from Winston Churchill this week, and I think it is very true. *“We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.”* Be prepared.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim