

32nd. Sunday in Ordinary Time

Whenever we are preparing to spend some time away from home, we want to take with us all that we will need for the journey. On Thursday night I met a woman and her son doing some last-minute shopping for her son's year seven trip to Canberra that was beginning the next morning. I hope that they found what they were looking for. But many of us leave something behind when we go away. When I went away recently I forgot to take my toothbrush.

Today we have heard Jesus tell a parable about ten maidens, half of whom left behind something a little more important than their toothbrushes. The story Jesus tells is based on the marriage customs of his time. The bridegroom would make his way to the home of the father of his bride and then bring her back to his father's home where the celebration of the marriage would take place. Women would wait and escort the bridegroom and his bride to the wedding. Delays were not uncommon because it may have taken some time to reach agreement between the bridegroom and the bride's family about the terms of the marriage.

Whatever about the background to the story the crunch comes when the news of the bridegroom's arrival is given. The ten of them had fallen asleep. When they were awakened five successfully lit their torches again and headed down the road to meet the bridegroom. They were the ones who had brought the extra oil with them. The other five had forgotten to bring any extra oil with them and their torches would not light again. They were told to go off and buy some more oil. When the bridegroom came they were not there to greet him. By the time they got back the doors were barred and in his anger that those women had not prepared well enough to carry out their duty, the bridegroom tells them that they were unknown to him.

The lesson that Jesus gives to stay awake really means to be prepared. Think ahead for what you need. Have your flasks of oil with you because you do not know how long you will be waiting in the dark for the bridegroom to come. As we listen to how Matthew tells that story it is clear that the bridegroom is the Lord himself. God is described a number of times in the Hebrew Scriptures as being the husband of his bride the people of Israel. The bridesmaids in our story are people like you and me, the members of the Church who are awaiting the return of Jesus the bridegroom at the end of time. The oil that we need for our torches can speak of all the good things that we have done and still do in union with Jesus.

The bridesmaids who run out of oil are those who cry out "Lord, Lord" but whose words are not backed up by their good deeds. They have not prepared

themselves for the responsibilities of people who serve the Lord. They had not thought through what it means to be Church. They have put themselves in danger of missing out on the Feast of the Kingdom.

I thank God that he is so merciful to us. God longs for us to share in the good things that that he has prepared for us. He wants us all to be with him forever. But I can't help thinking that many of us make it pretty hard for God to share with us what he intends. We get so easily distracted by what is not important. We forget to take our oil with us. We say that we do not have time to pray or read the scriptures. We don't think of gathering for Sunday Mass as being the most important thing we can do in the week. We measure the value of things by what they cost rather than by the love with which they have been given to us.

Today's first reading can help us to put things into perspective. It is a beautiful reflection upon the gift of God's wisdom. The wisdom of God is an expression of the very life of God, given to us so that we can make choices that are good and loving and right. Being open to Wisdom is being open to God and all that God wants to do for us and through us. "By those who love her she is readily seen, and found by those who look for her. Quick to anticipate those who desire her, she makes herself known to them. Watch for her early and you will have no trouble; you will find her sitting at her gates. Even to think about her is understanding fully grown."

This weekend the families whose children are preparing for the Sacraments are taking another step along their journey. Their children are celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation this Thursday. Today they are renewing their commitment to prepare well for this and for the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. Most parents do not find sharing their faith with their children easy. The resources that they are using asks them to share their understanding of the scriptures with their children, reflect upon them together and pray that they will put into practice what they learn there. Today we renew our commitment to pray for and support these families. We can ask God to share his Spirit of Wisdom with them. We can ask God to give them the confidence to talk about their own relationship with God and to model that relationship for their children.

Today we need to pray for ourselves too; that we will be like those five wise bridesmaids, who are truly ready to welcome Jesus into our hearts and into our lives. We pray that we will have our torches lit with the oil of the good things we long to do for him.