

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 24:42a, 44

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Stay awake and be ready!

For you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Matt 25:1-13; L154A

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

“The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise.

The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps.

Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

At midnight, there was a cry,

‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish ones said to the wise,

‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’

But the wise ones replied,

‘No, for there may not be enough for us and you.

Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.’

While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came

and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him.

Then the door was locked.

Afterwards the other virgins came and said,

‘Lord, Lord, open the door for us!’

But he said in reply,

‘Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.’

Therefore, stay awake,

for you know neither the day nor the hour.”



Reflecting on the Gospel

In 1907 Robert Baden-Powell founded the Boy Scouts and soon after, in 1912, Juliette Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts after she met Baden-Powell. Although other interests have drained the number of Scouts worldwide, several million young girls and boys still adhere to the principles of these organizations. They share the same motto: “Be prepared!” The motto emphasizes preparedness in

mind through self-discipline and preparedness in body through wholesome exercise and activities. Be prepared! Although we cannot prepare for every contingency in life, thinking ahead, anticipating outcomes, and being alert to persons and events around us do help us meet head-on whatever comes our way.

We avoid as many surprises as we can that may disrupt our journey of life. This Sunday’s gospel is about being prepared. And while Jesus doesn’t use the Scout motto’s words, he does tell his disciples to “stay awake.” Jesus tells a parable that reminds us of what we must be prepared for in life the most: the Second Coming of Jesus when this world as we know it will end and all will be returned to the Father.

This parable is fraught with symbolic images of light, delay, waiting, drowsiness and sleep, a cry, midnight darkness, arrival, wedding feast, some admitted and some are not. All these images turn our attention to the Second

Coming of Christ, our own waiting in this in-between time of living in both light and darkness, the reality that some will be admitted to the heavenly banquet and some will not, the necessity of being known by Christ and being prepared for his coming. Wait we must, but this waiting is not inactive or empty. How we spend this waiting time determines how we will spend the rest of time.

There is no doubt that the Bridegroom will come. What is unexpected is his *long delay* which Matthew is specifically addressing. The question for us, then, is how do we deal with the delay? How do we live in the in-between time of now and what is to come? Matthew is suggesting an issue beyond vigilance—that we must also *be prepared*. We are living in a crucial time of spending our lives being open to Christ’s comings in the here and now. The here and now is an all-important readying for his Second Coming, and we cannot afford to sleep it away! The long delay of the Bridegroom’s coming reveals both the wisdom and longer vision of the five virgins who were prepared and the *loss* of those who were shortsighted and unprepared—the “door was locked” and they were not admitted to the wedding feast.

Living the Paschal Mystery

We rarely, if ever, view our daily Christian living in light of the final coming of Christ. But his final coming is, in fact, the context which gives meaning to our daily behavior and our ongoing hope. If we are not ready at the Second Coming of Christ (with its accompanying judgment), we can’t count on anyone else to cover for us. We are provided now with all we need (e.g., wisdom, invitation to vigilance, warnings about preparedness) to be ready when Christ comes. The real challenge is not to think of this as only a future event that won’t happen in our own lifetime. *When* Christ will come is not the important issue. We don’t know when Christ will come again! And so Christian living requires that we act each day as if this were the day when our Bridegroom will come and invite us to the feast. We must be ready. We must be prepared. Are we?

## Focusing the Gospel

**Key words and phrases:** kingdom of heaven, bridegroom, long delayed, midnight . . . cry, those who were ready went into the wedding feast, stay awake

**To the point:** This parable is fraught with symbolic images of light, delay, waiting, drowsiness and sleep, a cry, midnight darkness, arrival, wedding feast, some admitted and some are not. All these images turn our attention to the Second Coming of Christ, our own waiting in this in-between time of living in both light and darkness, the reality that some will be admitted to the heavenly banquet and some will not, the necessity of being known by Christ and being prepared for his coming. Wait we must, but this waiting is not inactive or empty. How we spend this waiting time determines how we will spend the rest of time.

## Connecting the Gospel

**to the first reading:** The first reading reveals that wisdom is a virtue given to all those who seek her. Even before we desire and watch for wisdom, she comes to us. In the gospel, the Bridegroom's coming is assured even before we desire or watch for his coming.

**to experience:** We rarely, if ever, view our daily Christian living in light of the final coming of Christ. But his final coming is, in fact, the promise which gives ultimate meaning to our daily behavior and our ongoing hope.

## Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

**to the readings:** In these verses from Psalm 63 we speak of consciously seeking God: we pine and thirst for God, we gaze toward God, we bless God throughout our life, remembering God even at night. And we proclaim that our seeking will be rewarded with a "kindness . . . greater . . . than life" and with "the riches of a banquet." Both the first reading and the psalm reveal that God/Wisdom comes to those who seek what God/Wisdom has to offer. The very seeking guarantees the reward.

The gospel reading reminds us, however, that we can be misled by the *appearance* of seeking. All ten virgins go out to meet the bridegroom, all ten participate in the role culturally assigned to them. But half of them are not really looking for the bridegroom; they are merely going through a routine. True vigilance, true seeking for God, demands ongoing preparation and work. The choice is ours and the consequences eternal. Christ is coming, even if delayed. Are we ready for his arrival? Do we really thirst for him or do we merely mouth the words?

**to psalmist preparation:** What does it mean for you to thirst for God? How do you experience this thirst? What superficial satisfactions distract you? What do you need to do to prepare yourself to receive the more that comes from God?

## ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- I "sleep away" opportunities to know and be known by Christ when I . . .
- I actively await the Second Coming of Christ by . . .
- What it means to me to be "wise" during the "long delay" of the Bridegroom's coming is . . .

## PRESIDERS

My preaching helps the assembly keep their lamps trimmed and burning in their daily living when I say . . .

## DEACONS

My serving ministry is an essential part of the church's waiting for the Second Coming of Christ in that . . .

## HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

My hospitality for others teaches me to be more vigilant for Christ's coming by . . .

## MUSIC MINISTERS

My music ministry is a light that shines in the darkness of waiting for Christ's coming when . . .

## ALTAR MINISTERS

Serving others is a way to be vigilant and prepare for Christ's coming because . . .

## LECTORS

My preparation as a minister of the word is an active preparation for the coming of Christ in that . . .

## EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Holy Communion is already a participation in the Bridegroom's wedding feast because . . .