

Homily on Matt 25:1-13

November 10, 2017

Intro: In 1981 I was the summer replacement for the pastor on a village over the Danube River. Everyone in the village of 500 was Catholic, and a wedding was something in which everyone participated, because marriage and children are a community project. (That is why the Church frowns on marriages in parks where only a few members of the community are joined. Marriage is a parish-wide community affair and we all should be present in the church.)

Marriage in Jesus' village communities was the same. The central act of the marriage was the procession in which the groom led his bride to his own home where the ceremony was completed and the marriage consummated. The ceremony began in the bride's home, where the dowry and other financial arrangements were worked out. These could be complicated, and so the procession might be delayed. (Indeed, in all the marriages I have witnessed, only one began on time, usually because of last minute adjustments to the bride's gown and those of her party.) The young women of the village had an indispensable role in lighting the couple's way to the completion of their marriage.

Matt: This gospel is in the last part of Jesus' ministry, his teaching about the end of the world and the final judgment. In this parable Jesus has ten young maidens to carry the ceremonial oil lamps for the wedding procession. They are in place and their lamps are burning, but then it becomes clear that the bridegroom is delayed at the bride's house. (Perhaps the financial arrangements are taking some time to straighten out.) So they all quench their lamps and go to sleep. Suddenly, at midnight, the cry goes out: "Here he comes!" Then the five imprudent ones, trying to light their sputtering lamps, realize that their oil supply has dwindled to nothing. They ask the prudent ones to give them some of their oil. The prudent ones refuse, not because they are selfish, but because if they loan out their small extra supplies, then all the lamps will probably burn out before the bridal couple comes, and then there will be no lights for the procession. The ceremony will be dimmed, if not ruined.

While the imprudent maidens are away trying to get some oil, the bridegroom comes, the five prudent girls light his way to the groom's house and enter the home for the wedding, and the doors are locked against the night. When the foolish girls arrive and ask for admittance, they are not recognized; they have failed their master.

In the context of all of Matthew 24-25 the Bridegroom who is coming is the Lord Jesus at the last judgment. And so the point of the parable is, "Stay awake! For you do not know either the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come in judgment."

The Meaning of the parable is clear for Matthew's readers. They had been daily expecting the return of the Messiah in judgment for over 40 years after his death and resurrection. They have by now lost their anticipation that he is coming; they have fallen asleep in their Christian conduct of life. Matthew's Jesus warns them to wake up and live right, for they don't know when he is coming.

The meaning for us is similar. After 2000 years we have lost our anticipation that Jesus is coming in our lifetime to judge the world. Every year some false prophet arises to tell us that the end is next week, but they all turn out to be crazies. There are clear climate signs that the world will no longer support our human folly, and so our human world will end, but that end is probably still a couple of centuries away.

What is clear is that none of us knows when or how he or she will die. We do not know when the Lord will

come to judge us individually. We know that we should spend more time reading the gospels and praying over them, but we don't do it. There is no urgency. We know that God wants us to reconcile with someone who has seriously offended us, but just not now. We know that God is calling us to greater service in the church and in our world, but we don't have the time just now. And then some drunk driver swerves across the road and kill us, with all of our God's calls unheeded.

There is no time like the present. Jesus calls us to wake up and act now. We do not know the day or the hour when we will be summoned before the final judgment on our lives. Take some time this day and this week to think about to what God has been calling you and resolve to act on it, **now**. The warning is the Good News.