Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A

Wisdom 6:12–16; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Matthew 25:1–13

Excerpts from Pope Francis - *Angelus* - 12 November 2023

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers & sisters, today's Gospel offers us a story regarding the meaning of life of each person. Well, I know some will probably say I don't see the connection. If Jesus uses parables, yes, you are right that sometimes we don't see how it concerns us. Ten bridesmaids are called to go out to meet the bridegroom. Why should this matter. The bridesmaids are us, and the bridegroom is Jesus.

The objective of the parable is to help us prepare for the day when we will be called to go to Jesus! In the parable however, five of the 10 bridesmaids are wise and five are foolish. Let us see what constitutes wisdom and foolishness. Wisdom in life, and foolishness in life. All those bridesmaids are there to welcome the bridegroom, that is, they want to meet him, just as we too desire a happy fulfilment of life.

The difference between wisdom and foolishness is therefore not in goodwill. Nor does it lie in the punctuality with which they arrive at the meeting: they were all there. The difference between the wise and the foolish is in the preparation. The text says: the wise "*took flasks of oil* with their lamps" (v. 4); the foolish, on the other hand, did not. This is the difference: the oil. And what is one of the characteristics of the oil?

That it cannot be seen: it is inside the lamps, it is not visible, but without it, the lamps have no light. Let us look at ourselves, and we will see that our life runs the same risk. Many times, we are very careful about our appearance — the important thing is to take good care of one's image and make a good impression in front of others. Nothing really wrong with that. But Jesus says that the wisdom of life lies elsewhere: in taking care of what cannot be seen but is more important; taking care of the heart.

Nurturing an inner life. This means knowing how to stop and listen to one's heart, to keep watch over one's own thoughts and feelings. How often are we unaware of what has happened in our heart on a [given] day? What happens within each one of us? Wisdom means knowing how to make room for silence, in order to be able to listen to ourselves and to others. It means knowing how to give up some of the time spent in front of telephone screens, to look at the light in the eyes of others, in one's own heart, in God's regard upon us.

It means not falling into the trap of activism, but devoting time to the Lord, to listening to his Word. And the Gospel gives us the right advice so as not to neglect the oil of inner life, the "oil of the soul". It tells us that it is important to *prepare it*. In fact, in the story, we see that the bridesmaids already have the lamps, but they have to prepare the oil. They have to go to the sellers, buy it, put it in the lamps. It is the same for us.

An inner life cannot be improvised, it is not a matter of a moment, of once in a while, of once and for all. Inner life has to be prepared by dedicating a little time every day, with fidelity, as one does for every important thing. So, we can ask ourselves: what am I preparing at this moment in life? Within myself, what am I preparing? Perhaps I am trying to put aside some savings, I am thinking about a house or a new car, concrete plans… They are good things; they are not bad things.

But am I also thinking about dedicating time to the care of the heart, to prayer, to service to others, to the Lord who is the destination of life? In short, how is the oil of my soul? Each one of us, let us ask ourselves this: how is the oil of my soul? Do I nourish it, do I keep it well?

May Mother Mary help us to appreciate the oil of inner life.