

HOMILY FOR TRINITY 22– NOVEMBER 8TH 2020

This morning we heard words from Jesus as to how we might understand the Kingdom of Heaven. He illustrates this with a parable, a story which would have held the interest of the crowd milling around him, painting word pictures to help them understand his teaching.

“The Kingdom of heaven is like...” Jesus says, and goes on to tell us that “it is like 10 maidens who, with their lamps, went to meet the Bridegroom” and enjoy the festivities of the wedding.

But, this parable is one with a difference. In it Jesus prophesies His Second Coming and that we must be alert to its arrival, that it will come swiftly and without warning; catching people unawares.

Here we have 10 young women waiting to escort the bridegroom to the wedding, complete with their oil lamps. The bridegroom is very late and five of the 10 young ladies doze off. Then suddenly the cry goes up: “The bridegroom is coming.” The five ladies who brought spare oil along with them are allowed to enter, whilst the others who found themselves short of oil are excluded.

Whilst we may find it a little bizarre, we can pick out some of important points in the story. The bridegroom who is on his way is an allusion to Christ. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly and we must take certain precautions so that we are prepared for His coming.

Let’s look at this in a little more detail..... The bridegroom is coming. The 10 young women have no doubts about that fact. They have prepared their torches and arrived ahead of the groom and now wait for him.

All of them went to meet him with the same joy and with the same assured hope. Five of them are so certain that he will come that his delay doesn’t upset them and, serene in this knowledge , they are complacent and doze off to sleep.

“Then at midnight someone shouts, he is coming.” It’s as if the transition from one day to another were the transition from one state to another.

We know that the 10 maids were equally attentive in waiting for the bridegroom; but only five were admitted to the wedding and the rest kept out. The wise five brought a reserve of oil and were allowed in; the five

so-called foolish maids didn't provide for themselves and were not allowed into the wedding.

We might well think that they were spurned rather brutally: "I tell you I do not know you," the bridegroom stated. Their lack of foresight might have deserved a mild rebuke, but most of us would feel that total rejection was very harsh. After all, they believed and hoped as the others did, so, why is the reserve of oil so important in this story?

What seems clear is that every believer must have something in reserve when the Lord comes; an added store of prayerful understanding of our Lord's mission, or an additional reserve of wisdom and spiritual strength which will allow them to escort the Lord into His Kingdom.

However, we know that light and strength are gifts of God, granted to us through His Spirit. How, then, can someone be condemned for mere thoughtlessness..... especially if they remain faithful to the essential things and go out to meet the Lord?

I think the reading from the Book of Wisdom we heard this morning gives us a lead. Here we are alerted to the need to always live life according to God's commandments; to challenge those things we see as wrong round about us; to carry a special supply of oil so that we can keep our lamps alight, so that we do His work according to His will.

Even though a person may come to Church each Sunday and fully believe in the Lord and His return, they can still live an uncaring life, a selfish life, a self-centred life unwilling to foster justice and righteousness.

They may nurture a false type of confidence, feeling that there will always be time later to trim their lamps and maintain a good supply of oil, to give God and His world a little more thought,

In reality, true certainty about the Lord's Coming commits us to a serious and deliberate attempt at acquiring, cultivating and nurturing a proper inner attitude in our daily lives and towards those around us.

We must choose the will of God, the path of justice and righteousness, whatever cost it may entail. We shall then be like the five wise maidens who "took flasks of oil as well as their torches."

Today's message tells us that the Lord's coming will be sudden, and compelling. The story suggests that we would be foolish to imagine that

we will have plenty of time to ready ourselves for it. We must be ready every minute of every day.

The Lord's Coming will be more like a blinding flash of light, unexpected, but quite decisive and will give life to those who are in tune with it, to open the door when the wedding of the bridegroom takes place.

St. Paul proclaimed this Coming of the Lord in his Letter to the Thessalonians, part of which we heard this morning. Paul stresses the certainty of the Lord's manifestation, including in the picture those who have already died. He wants to reassure those who fear that the dead will not be able to participate in Christ's return.

Our Lord's parable serves as an important reminder to us to be alert, but not alarmed, to be constantly aware that the Second Coming of Christ could occur at any time. Perhaps Christ's Second Coming has ceased to be a real conviction with us; perhaps we feel there is no evident sign of His coming; perhaps we may even feel that He is inactive in the world.

The passage of time can wear out our patience, especially in light of the present world situation; doubt can begin to creep in and we can become indifferent to the future events as predicted throughout Scripture.

But, the Lord really is coming; He will return and His return will be sudden. The certitude of this should bring us both strength, peace of mind and the knowledge that we must be as ready as the five bridesmaids with their extra oil.

It isn't a hypothetical statement, Jesus told us what would happen, it isn't some theological notion thought up by a clever-dick lecturer, it's a fact for which we should continually thank our Lord with all our heart, soul and mind.

Let us pray that we can hold on to this knowledge with all humility, allowing it to fill us all with joy, peace and tranquillity. For both the present and the future.