

## Readings for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year

FIRST READING: Wisdom 6:12-16

A reading from the Book of Wisdom:

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire; Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate. For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence, and whoever for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care; because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

***My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.***

O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.

***My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.***

Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory, For your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you.

***My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.***

Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name. As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.

***My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.***

I will remember you upon my couch, and through the night-watches I will meditate on you: You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.

***My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.***

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians:

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are

left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words.  
The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

### **Reflection for the 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year**

The reading from Wisdom describes wisdom. What or, better, who is wisdom? The writer called wisdom her. Whoever seeks her will find her. Wisdom, herself will seek the seeker in return. This is one of the few times that anything divine is feminine. It may even be the only time. We call God our father and Jesus our brother. We have called the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus. We can also call the Spirit our sister. God is far beyond any of our conceptions. There is no limit to the parameters of God. To discern wisdom deepens our experience and notion of God. Wisdom is also God's wisdom. Many theologians and scholars of scripture see this passage as describing the Holy Spirit. Some people can have wisdom that prompts giving good advice. Others may have wisdom that can solve problems. However, as described, this wisdom is not conventional. Biblical wisdom is the discernment of the will of God. The response to this wisdom is to hear and act in accord with God's will. God will give what the hearer needs to do so.

The author spoke of witnessing the dawn and keeping vigil. The one who keeps and witnesses these things has already received wisdom. Seek this wisdom as wisdom has already found you. Think of God for God is here and near. The way we discern what God wants is prayer. What does it mean to pray? Praying is not reciting, reading or saying prayers. Prayers are the means to prayer. We say that we offer our prayers to God. God already knows why we pray, what we want and, more importantly, what we need. Prayer is not so much our gift to God but God's gift to us. Prayer is knowing God's presence now.

I have prayed the Lectio Divina for many years. I discovered it on my own while I was in college. I prayed it for years not knowing what it was. It can involve reading scripture or a spiritual reading. One ponders the theme of the reading. The prayer takes the form of a meditation, sitting quietly. The meditation can lead to contemplation. I can describe what contemplation is like. Sometimes people, when at mass or praying the rosary, report, all of a sudden, they are aware of something completely unrelated to prayer. Some feel that they have been daydreaming or distracted. Contemplation happens when God leads us to those thoughts. They are neither daydreams nor distractions but the things about which God wants us to pray.

The Lectio Divina has deep roots in monasticism, and is available to all. It can take a few minutes or last for hours. Praying the rosary can bring about a similar experience. God has no use for the repetition of words. They are for our benefit. The rosary is a Catholic mantra. Its purpose is to lead the one who recites it to get caught up in the repetition and lost in it. Behind all the Hail Mary's are the mysteries and decades. They are the story of Jesus as seen through the eyes of Mary. Like the Lectio Divina, the mysteries become the themes of contemplation.

Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholics share another form of prayer like this. It is called the Jesus Prayer. This form of prayer involves breathing too. The prayer is simple and has two repeated lines. The first line is, "Jesus, son of God." One inhales slowly and deeply while saying or thinking the line. The second is, "Have mercy on me." One exhales slowly while saying or thinking it. The process is repeated over and over. I will pray the Jesus prayer while stuck in traffic. It helps. The Jesus prayer developed in response to Paul's admonition to "pray always, unceasingly." Many who practice this form of prayer will be praying it all the time. Sometimes people carry Jesus beads, not unlike our rosary to have a tactile loop of beads to engage the sense of touch while praying.

There is another form of prayer similar to this. At first glance, it may seem nothing like it. Here I focus not on the means or path of this prayer but the results. Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians will experience a state of prayer where they will seem to babble. Its technical term is glossolalia. Commonly it is called "speaking in tongues." It is best experienced while people pray together in a group. Although it is also common to experience it while praying alone. People will report being "carried away" or "caught up" in the Holy Spirit. When I experience a state of contemplation, I will describe the experience with those same words. People who are very much into the two Christian mantra devotions, the rosary and Jesus prayer describe their experience in the same way too.

The way the author of Wisdom talks about experiencing wisdom, the more I hear my experience of contemplation. Our means to a state of prayer is very ancient and a gateway to knowing that God is near.

Many years ago, I visited a wake. Before I left for home, I had to stop in to the office and speak to the funeral director. When I arrived in the office, the director was with a family. The director was admonishing the folks not to grieve and stop their crying, quoting Paul. When the family left, the director took me aside and remarked that those, grieving and crying people had little faith. I pointed out that they had just lost their mother and we have no idea about their level of faith. One can still grieve with faith, hope and especially love. Didn't Jesus himself weep over

the people of Jerusalem and at the death of Lazarus, whom he loved? Sometimes we can't see the forest for the trees.

Paul gave an impressive description of the indescribable. Jesus told us that we can know neither the day nor the hour when he will return, let alone use cinematic special effects. On the other hand, Paul was a person of prayer. Undoubtedly he prayed and came to know the closeness of God as I do in prayer. He told us this in words and words will always fall short when glimpsing divinity. Paul may have merely told us that when Jesus returns, we'll know it. Jesus told us the same thing as he promised to return.

The gospel story is the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. The gospels were written in what we call Koine Greek. Koine means common. This is in two senses. First it was the Greek that people spoke every day, as opposed to the Classical Greek of the great ancient tragedies. It is also common in the sense of a shared tongue like a Lingua Franca. It is also, like Latin, a dead language. It hasn't been spoken by people in millennia. The word the translators used was virgin. Another possibility could be maiden or young, unmarried woman. If we take the culture of Jesus' time into account, teenage girl can be another way to translate the Greek. The five wise and five foolish teenagers; isn't that a thought.

This gives a different spin on the story, doesn't it? Perhaps the wise ones were older and more mature and the foolish ones younger and more inexperienced. I can understand the girls' behavior better. I have always had a few problems with the story. Why did Jesus tell it? What's the moral? Is it just as the gospel concludes; stay awake and be vigilant? Or can there be more? I have always perceived that the foolish girls trusted the advice of the wise ones. They may have been foolish at not bringing a reserve of oil, but they were also naïve in trusting, what sounds to me as five really nasty, mean girls. They wanted the bride groom for themselves! They tricked the others to leave and buy more oil. Really after midnight?

At my first parish, the other associate liked to have as many kids serve the big feast-day masses with as many kids as we had servers. We had six processional lanterns. He liked to have two kids carry one lantern. It made some sense since the lanterns were adult sized and pretty heavy for a ten-year-old kid to carry.

You may see where I may be going with this, but let me diverge with a description of First Century marriage customs. People who lived in towns and villages of Palestine in Jesus' day would not have just known one another; they were related to one another. There is no mention of a bride in this story, but it is a wedding story. The bride and groom most likely were relatives. The girls waited for the groom's return; from where? He would have been escorted to the bride's house to be married to the bride. He would be returning home after the wedding, reception and his first night as a husband with his wife. Now his family would celebrate his return and welcome their new family member into the family. The girls would have been close family members, cousins or possibly sisters. I mention this because the end of the story seems even more cruel, from this perspective.

Why weren't the wise girls wise enough to know that two could carry one lamp? Certainly sharing and looking to care for the foolish girls is a sign of Christian charity. I've always wondered what Jesus' actual lesson was. Did he tell us how to act or how not? Don't let the

wise-guys lead you astray. Don't let mean girls ruin your life. Would the foolish girls lose eternal life and the kingdom of God because they trusted others? Justice is not always fair, but God's justice is mercy and compassion for the sinner.

Granted, the lesson of wakefulness and vigilance ends the passage. Those may be the words of Matthew who retold the story as he wrote the gospel. Perhaps he, like I, struggled to make some sense out of Jesus' parable. A parable is never a straight-forward fable with an underlying moral to the tale. Jesus' parables are ambiguous and can be interpreted on many levels and in many ways. Matthew has chosen one approach. There are more.

Jesus has promised to return and establish, forever, God's Kingdom. God first turned to us so that we may turn to God. We listen to God's word in the hope to understand it. Through God's grace, as we live, God's message unfolds before us. We can wait and see or strive to discern God's will.

May God give us the strength to do what we must to keep one another safe and slow the ravages of COVID 19. Wear a mask, wash your hands and keep adequate social distance. It's not impossible, with God, to do.

James D. Beath  
November 7-8 2020