

## Be Watchful

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Twenty-fourth after Pentecost Sunday) is Matthew 25:1-13. This text is about the Parable of Ten Virgins.

This part of Matthew's Gospel is perfectly placed as Jesus prepares for his most important work yet—the cross. In ch 24 Jesus speaks about signs of the end. Then in ch 25 he emphasizes the need to be ready by teaching three parables, including our text. He begins with the parable of the ten virgins, then the parable of the talents, and finally, the parable of the sheep and goats, last week's Gospel. This emphasis by Jesus can never be taken too lightly.

The bridesmaids (virgins), were responsible for preparing the bride to meet the bridegroom. Scripture repeatedly compares the relationship between Christ and the Church to that of husband and wife (most famously in Eph 5:22-33). This parable uses similar though distinct imagery. Jesus is the Bridegroom; the virgins represent members of the church on earth.

On the wedding day, the bridegroom would dress in wedding garments, and his friends would escort him to the house of the bride. The bride would come out to meet them with her friends. The whole group would joyously parade to the home that the groom had prepared. Jesus used this imagery to describe His relationship to the Church. The Christian life is like a betrothal. Heaven will be like marriage.

The ten virgins represent the community of those who claim Christ as Lord, the church. The fact that there is a division among them is simply one more instance of the theme that Matthew features so frequently, namely, that among the visible company of Jesus' disciples, not all will be found to be true followers when their Master returns. The life of a disciple is characterized by joy and security as well as by challenge and spiritual danger. As with the prior unit (24:45-51), Jesus here is warning his followers to remain vigilant against the possibility of falling away and not being ready or able to honor him when he comes.

Streets of even large cities had no public lighting. The foolish virgins do not consider the possibility that the bridegroom might be delayed, and so they bring no extra oil for their lamps. The oil represents a faith continually sustained by the means of grace, thus able to endure until Christ's return.

Oil symbolizes spirit and life. In other words, the foolish one fell away from the faith. The foolish virgins have the outward signs but inwardly are strangers to Christ. We need to be going back constantly for that oil.

Even so, no matter how depleted our faith is, Jesus' grace can fill us to overflowing with a single word.

Prayer Keep us ever filled to overflowing, O Lord, that we continually abound in faith, hope, and love for you. Amen. (TLSB)