

A Reflection Matthew 25: 1-13

- Being the parent of three children I got to read a lot of children's books with them when they were younger. One of my favorites was the "Three Little Pigs". You remember the story; two pigs build their homes with sticks and straws. They were "party animals" (no pun intended). As the story tells us, they wanted to dance and play all day. They didn't want to put in the time and effort to build a strong house.
- The third pig patiently prepared and built a strong house made of bricks. Then came the big bad wolf and well you know the rest of the story. Ask any kindergartener and they will tell you who was wise and who was foolish!
- I wonder if the author of the "Three Little Pigs" read St. Matthews Gospel before writing his book because he sure borrowed the major theme of today's Gospel passage: BE PATIENT and BE PREPARED.
- And if you think about it we live in a world that doesn't really foster or encourage patience and preparation.
- When we watch television, how many of us wait for a show to return when a commercial comes on? I know I go for the TV remote and start channel surfing for that minute or so.
- We hate lines so we shop on-line. We pass that slow driver on the road in front of us.
- Look at some of our inventions that reduce the need to prepare. We have microwave ovens and instant breakfast bars. We have email so we don't need to prepare a letter or wait days for its arrival.
- In our fast paced world patience and preparation are almost counter-cultural!
- Yet in the midst of all this, today's Gospel reminds us that in a very important part of our life – our relationship with

God and our spiritual journey – being patient and prepared is critically important. Today Jesus uses a parable to teach us this lesson.

- In today's Gospel we find 5 maids who had a job to do, a purpose to fulfill. They needed to have lighted lamps to meet and escort a bridegroom to the wedding feast - and they didn't prepare for it.
- Why didn't they bring enough oil to keep their lamps lit?
- Was it ego? Did they think they knew better than the other maids who did bring enough oil? Were they so sure of themselves that they ignored the advice of others?
- Or maybe it was laziness. Carrying extra oil meant a little more work, a little more effort they didn't want to make.
- Ego, laziness – aren't these two traps we can all fall into in our own spiritual lives.
- Whatever the reason they didn't bring enough oil, Jesus uses this parable to give us a strong reminder that we need to prepare for our relationship with God. And we need to prepare for several reasons:
- We need to prepare or be left out. This is a hard message for us to hear, but it is also the most common interpretation of today's Gospel passage.
- On one level Jesus is talking about the end of time (or maybe the end of our individual life) when there will be a final judgment. Jesus tells us He will come back again to meet with us face to face. We need to be prepared by living a good life so we will be invited to share eternal life in God's Kingdom.
- As we approach the end of the Church year (Advent starts the new Church year and that is a few short weeks away!) we are asked to reflect on the end times.
- Do you know what bothered me most when I first read this Gospel passage? It bothered me that the five "wise" maids refused to share their oil with the other maids.

- It seemed almost “*unchristian*”, against everything the Lord taught us about loving others and sharing. But Jesus uses this part of the parable to tell us we must prepare because some things cannot be shared or easily acquired. They develop from within. Things like principles, morals, generosity, loving hearts and self-discipline.
- Take faith for example. It is a gift God gives to us but it requires an act of will on our part. We must want to believe, no one can make or force us. If you want proof think about the people in our RCIA program that we see at Mass every Sunday. They want to learn, want to believe even more deeply. So they study with us for a year to prepare to draw closer to God. They wait patiently and prepare for the sacraments of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation.
- Jesus tells us to prepare because there are things we just cannot hand to someone or just take from someone.
- Finally, we need to prepare because unlike the bridegroom in the parable, the real bridegroom (Jesus) is already here! Jesus is already here. Maybe not face-to-face as it will be someday but He lives and moves and dwells among us: right here, right now.
- And just the way we prepare for work or school or other aspects of our life, we need to prepare for our daily encounters with the Lord.
- We have the opportunity to meet Jesus in the people we encounter daily – family, friends, co-workers and especially those in need. Remember when Jesus disciples asked Him: “When did we see you hungry or naked or sick Lord? And Jesus answered: when you fed the hungry, clothed the naked, cared for the sick – that is where you saw me!
- Jesus makes Himself present to us in so many ways. In our prayers and meditations; we meet Him in the scripture readings where He speaks to us; He comes to us

in the sacrament of penance with loving forgiveness; and in a very real way He comes to us each time we receive Holy Communion.

- It all comes back to the question: are we taking the time to listen for Him, to see Him in all these ways? Are we patient? Are we preparing?
- Our job *is to prepare* and embrace these encounters, these opportunities to draw close to Jesus.
- And as the wise maids did – light a candle in our little part of the world so that Jesus can be seen and known by others.