

# Reflection for the 32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A

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The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/111223.cfm>

## **1st Reading:** *Wisdom of Solomon 6:12–16*

This selection from the Book of Wisdom extols the virtues of Wisdom. The Wisdom tradition was very strong around the time of Christ and this book was written maybe only 100 years before his coming. In many ways, wisdom can be learned from living the Law but also, it goes beyond the Law, as our Gospel today will show.

## **2nd Reading:** *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 or 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14*

We are still in 1 Thessalonians, but we have skipped down a couple of Chapters to get to the point of today's reading. It's one we are used to and is about the end-times and because of that, fits in with the theme of the Gospel today.

## **Gospel:** *Matthew 25:1–13*

**Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.** Mt 25:13

### **Gospel Reflection:**

What are you preparing for, or what should you be preparing for? I remember when I was in grade school, I would have a math test that I should have prepared for, but I didn't. I couldn't. It wasn't just that I was lazy. I wasn't good at math and studying didn't seem to help anyway. I was filled with anxiety and fear, and I just couldn't study.

In my adult life, I guess I have the same problem with homilies. Sometimes I am so filled with anxiety and fear that I just can't prepare. Luckily, the Holy Spirit seems to help me out a bit and you all don't complain very much anyway. I think many of us have had the experience of being foolish virgins.

This Gospel is not about a math test, though. It's about preparing to meet the Lord. Theologically, we say that the Lord is present in the Mass in four distinct modes; the community gathered, the Word proclaimed, the Blessed Sacrament, itself, and in the person of the priest presider. We teach that. I don't know how many people hear it... I mean hear it in such a manner that they want to experience the Lord's presence in the Mass.

It raises the question In my mind, "How did you prepare for Mass today?" I know the general routine. We shut the alarm off and make a decision about whether to sleep for a few hours more or get up and go to Mass. If we have to get kids ready, it's even worse; we have to get them up, feed them, get them washed and presentable, and warn them that if they don't behave in church, they won't get a doughnut afterward.

Getting ready is a lot of work, but it's about more than just physically getting ready. We should be conscious of the fact that, like the virgins in the Gospel, we're getting ready to meet the Lord! Instead of just 'going to Mass', we should be going to spend some time with the Lord.

We should create a conscious transition period within which we leave the cares of the world behind in order to get ready to meet the Lord. If this transition period doesn't begin when we start getting ready at home, it could begin when we get into our cars to begin the journey or even when, at the parking lot, we get out of our cars and begin the walk toward the church doors. If you have children, imagine that you are taking them to meet the Lord.

Starting up the car, or closing it up and locking it, becomes a signal to your whole being that you are going to meet the Lord. It's like my CPAP machine. When I put the mask on and start up the machine, it is a signal to my body that it is time to go to sleep. Now that I'm used to it, it works almost every time.

If you are at a church like the San Diego Cathedral, where I usually preach, you have another signal when you begin the climb up that tremendous number of steps leading up to the church doors. Imagine leaving the mundane on the ground and ascending to the transcendent time and place where you will meet the Lord.

The next thing is to try to experience the Lord's presence in his four modes of presence in the Mass. It would take too long to try to do that in this homily... that discussion could take up a whole book. Yes, that's a plug for my book. You can find it on Amazon and read the sample part of it.

The first step, though, is to want to experience the Lord's presence and then, to prepare yourself for it.

Oh, and by the way, if we can learn to experience the Lord's presence at Mass, we will have the fuel that we need to greet him on the last day and avoid his telling us, "I don't know you."

God bless...

### **Personal Reflection:**

**Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.** Mt 25:13

#### **Question:**

What words or phrases grabbed your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or day-to-day life? (Why do you think they grabbed your attention?) What might God be trying to say to phrases have to your you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

#### **Alternative:**

Share about/Reflect upon a time when you were meeting someone special. How did you prepare? Where you nervous? How did the encounter go? What's the difference between meeting another human being and meeting the Lord? How can you be better prepared to meet him?

### **Verse by Verse:**

Mt 25:1-13 - The Parable of the Foolish and Wise Virgins | Commentators discuss whether or not this parable should be interpreted in the pre-Christian context wherein Jesus lived and preached. If so the bridegroom is God and the bride would be the Jewish people. This imagery is already found in Hebrew scripture. (Is 61:10, Is 62:5, Jer 2:2) If it is interpreted in the Christian context of the time of Matthew's writing, the bridegroom would be Jesus at his second coming and the bride the Christian Church.

Also, in an effort to interpret the story in light of Palestinian wedding traditions during Jesus time, the question arises whether or not the bridegroom is arriving at the bride's father's house to collect his bride or has already collected his bride and is traveling to his father's house where the wedding ceremony and celebration will be held. NJB says that the celebration may be taking place at the bride's father's house.

My suggestion is to not focus too much on such considerations. Don't miss that the meaning of this parable is to be prepared, as is noted in Mt 25:13. My tendency is to interpret this parable in light of the delayed second coming of Jesus to gather up his bride, the Church, and take her to his Kingdom in heaven. (The Church has expected our Lord's return to occur much sooner than the time when Matthew's Gospel was written.)