

## Homily for November 8, 2020

Tradition and Sacred Scripture are deep and rich and it takes time to express the completeness of our Faith. It is hard to sum up our faith in a few words. But one of the ways we often do it is by using Jesus' answer to the question, "What is the Greatest Commandment?" Every time this question is asked in the Gospels, the answer is the same, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the Greatest and First Commandment. And the Second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love God first and totally. Love neighbor as oneself. In God these go together. They are of one fabric. They flow into and out of each other.

In our human experience, they sometimes seem at odds with each other. Sometimes a person will concentrate on worship and theology, and never get around to loving other people. Or a person will reduce spirituality and morality to being kind to others, and disregard his relationship with God. But God is the source of love and reveals to us how to correctly love the person next door.

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Jesus tells lots of parables. And since He knows our limitations in grasping the fullness of the First and Second Commandments, He teaches different lessons with different parables. I know this is an extreme simplification – but a lot of the parables can be split into two different groups. There are those that teach about loving God with all our heart. And there are those that teach about loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The difficulties people sometime have with the parables come when they think the parables are teaching about one thing, and they are really teaching about another.

For instance, this week, and for the next two weeks, we are reading all of Chapter Twenty-Five in Matthew. Each Sunday we read one of the three judgment scenes. This week and next, we are going to be all confused if we try to read the parable Jesus gives as a lesson on how to live morally toward others. Today, all that would do is get us frustrated with the "Wise Virgins" for not sharing their oil with the foolish ones.

**But this is a parable about loving God first and totally. Next week is another one about loving God first. And then finally – in two weeks – Jesus tells of the Great Judgement between those who are sheep and those who are goats. And THAT teaching is about loving the neighbor as oneself.**

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**So, this parable is about the Kingdom of Heaven. When the bridegroom comes – which is the second coming of Christ when He comes in His glory – it is a time of judgment. And the judgment is based on whether people are there when He comes. And being present has to do with being wise, being prepared, and staying awake.**

**Much has been written about the detail of the oil for the lamps. Certainly as Christians we know the image from Matthew, chapter five, that we are the light of the world and are to be kept burning brightly so that others may see our good deeds and glorify our heavenly Father.**

**As one Bishop writes, “This interpretation of oil helps us understand why it could not be shared. It is not a matter of the wise maidens’ lack of generosity but of the inability for someone else to claim for themselves the manifest good deeds, living faith, and Christian decisions of another person’s life. Our oil is that gift of divine life within us and expressions of our faith that prepare us to meet God. With this understanding we can properly appreciate how important it is to possess and treasure that gift.”**

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**Another word is used in this parable. The five prepared virgins are called wise. Wisdom is often described as distinct from knowledge. A person can know many facts and techniques. To be wise is to be accomplished in using knowledge in the right way. Wisdom is often seen as a quality of older members of society. Wisdom has sometimes been said to be knowledge with experience. People who have learned from their mistakes are considered wise.**

**Wisdom in our faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit. And in today’s First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, we are treated to one of the passages that speaks beautifully of those who seek to be wise. God’s wisdom is described in a way that reminds us of falling in love with someone.**

**Today's First reading says that for those who seek wisdom, they find she is ready and waiting for them. And, using words that prepare us for the gospel reading, it says that those who keep vigil and watch for Wisdom find her coming to them.**

**We all want Wisdom. And Wisdom comes to those who love God. We all want to be among the wise who are ready to meet God. May we continue to seek wisdom, live wisely, and yearn for God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.**

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