

## 5. The Parable of the Ten Virgins

(Matt 25: 1-13)

As we journey through the parables, we've learned so much about the Kingdom of heaven through the beautiful, simple stories Jesus tells. We read the Parable of the Wedding Feast, in which a king invited his friends to a wedding feast for his son, but they made excuses and would not come. He then invited all of the poor and blind and lame, and anyone his servants could find in the highways and the hedges, to the great banquet. For those who have ears to hear, we understand that God is the king and Jesus is His Son, and He invites us into this beautiful banquet in heaven! We get a foretaste of that amazing banquet whenever we approach for Holy Communion, joining together with all the Saints and everyone in the Church.

Jesus tells another parable using the idea of a wedding to describe the Kingdom of heaven. There used to be a neat tradition for weddings, but we don't do it anymore. Picture an old village: back then, villages were small and people walked everywhere. On the evening of the wedding, the bride and her friends and family would be all dressed up and ready to go, and they would wait at the bride's house. Then the groom and his friends and family, all dressed up and ready, would walk in a procession to the bride's home. Weddings happened in the evening, so people needed lamps to see as they all walked down the road together in a large wedding procession.

Can you picture the bride and her friends waiting excitedly at her house? They all have their lamps lit and their fancy clothes on! They are listening for the procession that is surely going to be coming soon, so that they will all go to the wedding and see a beautiful ceremony and then share a lovely feast together! As the anticipation and excitement grew, it would be important for the bride and her friends to have extra oil in their lamps, because they don't know quite when the groom and his procession will arrive, and they need to be ready to join them when they come! The bride would have a veil on her face, and the bridegroom and his people would come singing to her house, and everyone would join the procession! The bride and groom would lead all of the wedding guests with their lamps lit in a joyful parade back to the groom's house, singing all along the way! They would come into the groom's house and close the doors, and then sign a special marriage contract. The couple would be blessed, and they'd all enjoy a wonderful feast together! Isn't that a neat tradition? It sounds like such a fun and special way to get married.

In our weddings today we do still see the bride gather with her bridesmaids and family, and the groom with his groomsmen and family, and then the two groups come together in the church

for the wedding ceremony, and then host a banquet or reception for all of their guests. Because we aren't all living near the church, we can't do the procession part.

Back when Jesus was walking the earth, this was a very common way to do a wedding, so the people He was talking to knew all about it -- so when He tells a parable about a wedding procession, once again He is telling a simple and easy story that everyone can understand.

Jesus said,

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

(Matthew 25: 1-13)

Of the ten virgins, half are wise and half are foolish. While everyone was waiting for the bridegroom, they were supposed to be getting ready for the procession: in particular, they needed to get their lamps ready. They should have filled them with oil, so that they'd be ready to go when the groom and his people arrived.

The five wise young women went and got oil; they filled their lamps and got ready. But the five foolish women went to sleep -- they all took naps! They wasted their time sleeping, and when the bridegroom came, they still hadn't gotten their oil! They procrastinated, and they missed it. They couldn't go with the others on this merry procession, to this beautiful wedding, and to join in with the wonderful wedding feast.

The foolish virgins were caught off guard, sleeping, and when they woke up they begged the others, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But Jesus tells us that the wise answered, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." The wise virgins would not share their oil, so the foolish ones ran out to buy oil, but while they were out, the bridegroom came, and the ones who were ready went with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Once the door was shut, it was shut. The foolish virgins ran and got oil, but it was too late! The door was shut, and they could not go into the feast.

What is the deeper meaning behind this parable? Well, remember from before that the wedding feast is heaven; it's the wonderful banquet God lays out for us in His Kingdom. God is the Father, so the Son must be Jesus! Jesus is the bridegroom.

It's an interesting idea to think of Jesus having a wedding, because of course He never had a girlfriend or got married -- but we do think of Jesus as being married to the Holy Church! That's because He loves each and every one of us, and wishes to be united with us forever. When two people become married, they create a family, right? That's a holy union. When we connect to Christ we become part of His family, His brothers and sisters, in another kind of holy union.

During Holy Week, we have beautiful Bridegroom Services, in which we sing and pray a lot about this idea of Jesus as the bridegroom coming to take us to the wedding so that we can be together with Him forever, and we ask ourselves if we are ready to go with Him to the glorious banquet in the Kingdom -- or if we might get left behind like those five foolish girls.

The virgins in this story are us, the Christians, and we are all waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ, our bridegroom, to take us to the abundant banquet in the Kingdom of God! If we are like the wise virgins we can joyfully join Christ and the others as they process to the feast joyfully, and then after the door is closed we can all enjoy God's Kingdom together.

In this story, the time spent waiting for the bridegroom is your whole earthly life. We are here on earth, waiting for Jesus to take us to the Kingdom of heaven. We should spend this time on earth preparing ourselves to meet the Lord. The wise virgins are the Christians who are expecting Christ and getting ready, and the foolish ones are those who procrastinate, who are sleeping through life and figure that there will be plenty of time to prepare for Christ. The bridegroom will come but they won't be ready! The time to go to heaven will come, and they won't be ready, so they won't go. The doors will close on them, and they won't be in the banquet.

Does it seem strange that the wise virgins who will join Christ and go to heaven to be with Him, refuse to share their oil when the foolish ones ask for some? Jesus usually tells us to be generous, to give away our belongings and to share with the poor and the needy. Why wouldn't these good Christians just give the foolish girls some oil for their lamps?

To understand that, we have to think about what exactly these lamps are, and what kind of oil might be inside them.

First of all, we know that Jesus is often called the Light of the World. He even says it Himself: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."" (John 8:12)

He is the light, and we are like lamps. He says, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5: 14-16)

We are supposed to be like lamps in order to light up the world! Jesus is the light, and when we are in communion with Him, that holy light is inside of us and we shine forth with His light. If you've ever seen someone who is really holy, you probably noticed a sweetness and kindness about them. That kind look in their eyes is like the light of Christ shining through them.

Our hearts are like lamps that shine with Christ's light. In the parable, the foolish virgins don't have enough oil in their lamps. If the lamp is our heart, what kind of oil would fill that lamp and make it shine?

The oil represents acts of mercy; the oil is all of the loving acts of forgiveness and kindness and generosity you've ever done. The oil is your faith and your love and the soft heart that you have cultivated. People who spend their whole lives preparing for Jesus have been praying and fasting and loving their neighbors, so their heart-lamps are full of oil, and they shine forth with Christ's light! This oil is their very faith and the virtues they have built up over time.

So when the Bridegroom comes, the wise girls have oil in their lamps, and they will shine forth the light of Christ and follow Him to the wonderful wedding banquet of heaven. But the foolish girls have been sleeping and lounging around. They haven't been prayerful, they haven't developed beautiful merciful and loving hearts. So when He comes, they're not ready. They don't have wonderful faith and goodness to shine that light forth. They're kind of dark inside.

So even when the foolish virgins ask for oil from the wise ones, there's no way to give them that oil. We can't give other people faith; they have to work on that themselves.

The bridegroom is coming -- Christ is coming -- to all of us, and it's up to us to make sure that we have developed that love, that mercy and faith and joy, that will be to oil in our lamps, lighting us on our path to the Marriage Banquet of heaven!

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## QUESTIONS:

Here are some questions for you!

Why was it so important that the virgins in the parable had enough oil in their lamps?

*Weddings happened in the evening, so people needed lamps to see as they all walked down the road together in a large wedding procession, and at the celebration afterwards!*

What was the difference between the two groups of young women in this parable? How could you know which virgin was in which group?

*The virgins are sorted into two groups: the wise and the foolish. The five wise young women got oil, filled their lamps, and were ready. The five foolish women went to sleep. They wasted their time sleeping, and when the bridegroom came, they still hadn't gotten their oil, so they missed both the procession and the wedding celebration.*

What does this parable mean for us? What was Jesus teaching His disciples (and us) through this parable?

*The virgins in this story are us Christians. We are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ, our bridegroom, to take us to the abundant banquet in the Kingdom of God! We are here on earth, waiting for Jesus to take us to the Kingdom of heaven. We should spend this time on earth preparing ourselves to meet Him.*

## FOR DISCUSSION:

Think about this parable, and look at your own life. If your heart is a lamp that shines with Christ's light, what is the oil that fills that lamp and makes it shine? Remember that we talked about how oil represents acts of mercy, like forgiveness and kindness and generosity. Think about this for a minute: Are you growing your faith through love by forgiving, being kind, and being generous? Do you have a lot of mercy-oil in the lamp of your heart? You don't have to answer that out loud: just think about it.

Now talk together about “shiny” people. Do you know anyone whose mercy-oil is so strong in their heart that you can see Christ shining in their life? Can you see how shiny their heart is? What do you see or feel when you are with them that makes you feel that way?

What one thing can you do to build up the mercy-oil in your own heart and be more like this “shiny” person that you know?