

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time “Keeping Our Lamps Lit”

Bishop Frank Schuster

As the days get shorter and shorter and nighttime gets longer and longer, and the rain gets colder and colder, the Church readings also become darker and more serious. As the Church’s liturgical year nears the end, the scriptures will challenge us to focus on “the end of the world” and the “final judgment”. In the next few weeks, we will hear about disciples who are vigilant and prepared for the end times when we must stand before the throne of God, and we will hear about disciples who are not. The invitation to all of us is to keep watch for we will not know the day or the hour when our Lord is going to call us. The question the Gospel will be asking us these next few weeks is: are we prepared to stand before the throne of God? This might seem like a scary question to ponder, but it really isn’t, not for people of faith. Rather it is a message aimed at helping us to get our priorities straight, if they are not already, so to focus on our discipleship more intensely because we don’t have all the time in the world.

In the Gospel today, ten virgins grabbed their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Jesus is telling a story of something that commonly occurred in his time. The ten virgins are what we would call today "the bridesmaids", the "bride" in this story can be interpreted as being humanity. The bridegroom, of course, is Jesus whose divinity marries humanity in the incarnation. It is a marvelous exchange. Jesus receives as the dowry our sin and death while we receive from Jesus his everlasting life. The point of the Gospel reading is the "bridesmaids", you and me, are challenged to keep our lamps lit and full of oil so that when the Lord comes to us, we can enter this marriage banquet that unites humanity and divinity for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of the whole world.

What does that image mean for us today? When it comes to discipleship, no matter how dark the world can be at times, we need to keep our lamps lit so our lives will lead people to Christ. How do we keep the lamps full of oil? We keep our lamps full by loving God and loving our neighbor. We keep our lamps full by staying close to Jesus in our prayer life and following his commandments. We keep our lamps full by being good stewards of the gifts God has given us by making our parish, community, nation, and world a better place. What might this mean for us this coming week? For one, maybe we can stop being angry towards people who think differently than me and try to love them instead. What would that look like? Honestly, we don’t have to sacrifice what we personally believe in so to love someone we disagree with. Jesus does that every day. There’s the proof (the cross)! There’s the proof!

My friends, only Jesus is the light of the world! When we fill our lamps with his grace and goodness, our baptismal candles will never go out. Configured to Christ, we are called to be a beacon of light to others in good times and in bad. And so, we could ask ourselves: what could this objectively look like this coming week?