

Closing Prayer

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things
in your beloved Son, the king of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Common Worship · The Third Sunday before Advent

Lectionary-based Catechesis • Year A

The Third Sunday before Advent

Sunday between 6 and 12 November inclusive

Principal Service readings

Wisdom 6.12-16	Wisdom is radiant and unfading; easily seen by her lovers
or Amos 5.18-24	The Day of the Lord; the requirement for justice
<i>Canticle:</i> Wisdom 6.17-20	The beginning of wisdom
or Psalm 70	A cry of distress
1 Thessalonians 4.13-18	Live in holiness and love
Matthew 25.1-13	Parable of the wise and foolish virgins

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Parable of the ten wedding attendants

Jesus spoke this parable to the disciples: "The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." ⁹But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." ¹²But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'

Matthew 25.1-13 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

From chapter 24 Jesus gives several parables about the end and the second coming. Today's reading is one of them. We might think that the five wedding attendants who had enough oil were being uncharitable towards the others whose oil had run out. Let us remind ourselves that it is a parable, not an instruction about how to behave. The point of the parable is about uppreparedness, and taking responsibility for our own preparedness. The moral of the parable can be summed up in its final sentence: 'So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour' (25.13).

Rather than thinking about why those with spare oil would not share it, it might be better to ask ourselves why did the oil run out for some of the attendants. It seems that, for some of the attendants, they were not prepared for a long wait. Is that what Jesus is saying about the kingdom of God? We have been waiting two thousand years, and are still waiting. But Jesus said, 'stay awake'.

From time to time religious leaders have stood up to proclaim that 'the end is nigh'. A lot of interest is generated by this type of religion. A classic example is William Miller (1782–1849) in America in the nineteenth century. Miller was so convinced that he could work out when the second coming of Christ would be that he mentioned a date: 22 October 1844 – a date which became known as The Great Disappointment. Hiram Edson, a Millerite, recorded that 'Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before... We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.'²

If we look at the wedding attendants overall we can see that they are a mixed bag of 'wise' and 'foolish' – some prepared and some unprepared. We might be reminded of the parable of the wheat and the weeds growing together. The master tells the servants to let them grow until harvest time. It's not for one group to throw out another, but God will act at the proper time. We might also be reminded of another parable of Jesus, where some are saying, 'Lord, Lord,' only to hear the Lord saying

² Quoted in: *Millennial fever and the end of the world* / George R. Knight. – Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993. – p.218.

that he does not know them (7.21-23; 25.31-46). This seems a counsel, then, to have fortitude and perseverance – and not to run out of spiritual 'oil'.

Quotations

1

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.

Nelson Mandela, 1918–2013

2

Though Christian fortitude appears in withstanding and counteracting the enemies that are without us; yet it much more appears in resisting and suppressing the enemies that are within us; because they are our worst and strongest enemies and have greatest advantage against us. The strength of the good soldier of Jesus Christ appears in nothing more than in steadfastly maintaining the holy calm, meekness, sweetness, and benevolence of his mind, amidst all the storms, injuries, strange behaviour, and surprising acts and events of this evil and unreasonable world.

The religious affections / Jonathan Edwards. 1746

Related topics

For further study:

Eschatology; parousia; final judgement; conversion; discipleship; service; heaven; hell; reign of God; pilgrim church; communion of saints; soteriology