

The Five Foolish and Five Wise Virgins

32nd Sunday of OT - November 08, 2020 Cycle A

When I was younger I was in great shape.

I remember times when my friends would say, "Let's go for a run."

I would go, and not have a problem, even though I did not run regularly.

Now I am old and fat and would probably collapse if I had to run more than a block.

Even when I was young I was in awe of Marathon runners.

Just the idea of running 26 miles, or 40 kms,

was enough for me to sit down and have an ice cream cone.

When I watch a marathon on TV there are two types of people that intrigue me.

The first, and they are very few, enter the stadium and they are completely spent.

They have used up every single ounce of energy in their body.

They are so spent that they collapse

and the only way they can continue is that if someone,

who is a good sportsman, helps them up and across the finish line.

The second group that intrigues me are the leaders, usually first, second and third.

After running 26 miles, or 40 kms,

they have enough energy left to sprint the last few hundred meters.

They have saved enough energy in their bodies

to stave off any last minute challenges to the winners circle.

I think both of these groups have something to say about our faith.

The first. Those who are completely spent, teach us that we need to pace ourselves.

Because if we burn out, if we exhaust ourselves completely,

we will not be good for anything...in fact we become a burden on the community.

This is not a good thing.

We see this in the five foolish bridesmaids, who did not pace themselves well,

and burnt themselves out and were not good for anything in the end.

The second group, those who were able to sprint at the end, paced themselves,

and were prepared for anything that might come up at the end.

We see this in the five wise bridesmaids, who prepared themselves for an extended wait.

In the end they still had oil in their lamps and they went in with the bridegroom.

I have to say that this parable always puzzled me, why didn't the wise share with the foolish.

Then I read a modern day version of the parable. It goes like this.

The Kingdom of heaven is like ten women who went looking for Boxing Day Bargains.

They set out bright and early and to their great delight,

secured places near the head of the line outside the department store.

Each of them had brought along her handbag which she gripped tightly

to guard against would be snatchers.

Five of the women were wise and generous.

They were hard working mothers who had made a lot of personal sacrifices
in saving up for the sales.

They desperately needed the bargains, as each had a family to provide for.

They were not thinking of themselves but of their homes and their children.

The other five were foolish and selfish.

They didn't really need the bargains as their children were grown.

It was a combination of greed and the excitement of bargain-hunting,
that had brought them along.

One thing was clear: they were thinking only of what they could get out of it for themselves.

The store was late in opening. The waiting was tiring.

All ten women grew sleepy, and managed to get forty winks standing there.

Then suddenly a cry arose: 'They're opening!'

With that each of them took a hurried look into her handbag to see if her money was still there.

It was then that the foolish ones discovered, to their horror,
that they had only a few dollars with them.

They had clean forgotten that they had gone on a spending spree the previous weekend,
and spent most of the money they had put aside for the sales.

In their panic they turned to the wise ones and said: 'Lend us a little money.

We'll pay you back just as soon as we get home'.

'Sorry', the wise ones answered, 'we've just barely got enough for ourselves.

This is our big opportunity. We can't afford to miss it.

The best thing you can do is dash back home and get some more'.

As they said this, they were carried inside the store on the crest of the wave of frantic bargain-hunters.

As for the foolish ones, they were left standing there.

However, they soon came to their senses, grabbed a taxi, and dashed back home.

But by the time the banks opened, and they got back to the store,
all the best bargains were gone.

They went to the manager and complained.

'Sorry, ladies', he said, 'but there's nothing I can do for you.

It's your own fault. Why didn't you come in time?'

They knew of course that he was right. They departed empty handed and sad.

I have to be clear the parable is not talking about a little money, or a little oil.

The parable is reflecting on two contrasting attitudes towards the future.

For the wise bridesmaids it was obviously the chance of a lifetime.

It was something they really appreciated and for which they had prepared diligently.

Here was a never-to—be-repeated opportunity to meet the Bridegroom
and to get into the wedding feast. No way were they going to miss it.

For the foolish ones they were only caught up in the excitement of the day.

They went, but they did nothing to prepare.

Deep down it didn't really matter if they got a bargain or not.

Even so, they felt let-down when they didn't get in.

These two conflicting attitudes are the difference between someone who is a doer of the Word,
and someone who is merely a hearer of the Word.

The parable is about planning for the future, and pacing oneself to see that one has a future to enjoy.
The early Church believed that Jesus' second coming was imminent. Just around the corner.
As time went on, we realized that we could not predict when Jesus' second coming would be.
However, even though we do not know when his second coming will be,
we still need to pace ourselves,
such that we will have energy in our bodies if anything suddenly comes up.
In other words we need to be ready at all times.

We cannot forget the Church has paired this parable with the first reading--about seeking wisdom.
As Christians one of our most important tasks is to seek out wisdom...the wisdom of God.
This wisdom guides us through life,
and guides us in such a way that we know exactly what we can or cannot do.

Put into the context of a marathon race,
the runners need the wisdom to know exactly what their bodies can do.
Too much effort and they will burn out.
Too little effort and they will be too far behind to win.

As Christians we need to seek out wisdom.
To know exactly what our gifts and talents are,
and use them in such a way that we do not burn ourselves out,
yet at the same time, staying in the lead, and leaving something in case something comes up.

When I say we need to know exactly what to do,
we also need the wisdom to distinguish the difference between
not being able to do something, and choosing not to do something because we are either

- 1) afraid,
- 2) holding on to some sort of false humility,
- 3) or simply because we are too lazy.

I would love to be able to sing the Mass, but that is not one of my gifts,
not something I am just able to do—
no amount of voice lessons from --Meagan/Holly,
would enable me to sing the Mass. I know my limits.

But at the same time we need to overcome our fears.
If the truth be told, for many years I was terrified of public speaking.
My knees would knock and my voice shake.
This still happens if I am addressing a large crowd with lots of VIP's.

However, I have never let my fear of public speaking stop me.
If I had, I would never have become a priest...and I love being a priest.

It takes wisdom to discern our gifts and talents.

And just as we need wisdom to discern our talents, we need wisdom discern our limits.

Let us mimic the actions of the wise bridesmaids, and not the actions of the foolish.