



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Are you ready for the coming of Jesus?

Readings: Wisdom 6: 12-16, Ps 62, 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, Matthew 25: 1-13

I have only to hear the opening of today's Gospel and my mind begins to travel back over the various wedding days in which I have participated as priest or guest or family. As officiant (remember that the bride and groom are the principal celebrants of the sacrament of marriage) I usually met the jaunty but appropriately nervous groom some twenty minutes ahead of the contest. Next – and usually most memorably – would come the bridesmaids. I say memorably because it took me some while, being a mere man, to work out what was going on. I think I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that the bridesmaids were beautifully attired. The brides, a patient woman friend explained to me, did not want to be outshone by their attendants. A plain woman did not want beauties behind her. No woman wanted frocks that would compete with her dress of the day. Now, fully initiated into the female psyche, I could watch, with amused comprehension and dark glasses, on the day nine bridesmaids turned up in puffballs of luminous orange chiffon. Or the day when the groom's sisters, who were the clearly pie eating champions of south Yorkshire, were obliged to spend the day in terminally challenged spandex

and net fairy costumes to provide a non-competitive backdrop to their radiant Titania. Happily, for the most part, dull now seems to be the order of the day.

In today's Gospel, of course, it is not the bride who is late. It is the groom. I have only once had that happen and a ghastly twenty minutes it was as we had to send the bride, in her horse-drawn carriage, on embarrassing laps of nearby roads assuring her that her unfortunate intended had not fled at the prospect but merely suffered a breakdown (of his wedding car).

She told me years later that it was the longest twenty minutes of her life. He has spent the rest of the marriage atoning.

I preface with this ramble because it is important to remember just what is going on in this big day in human life. Everybody is excited. Everybody is over-prepared. Everybody is looking forward to an immense day – a bonding of two lives, a joining of two families. Everybody is emotional, joyful, filled with hope and longing and goodwill and busting to get the celebration underway.

In today's parable Jesus uses the backdrop of a wedding to make his point. We are aware, as believers, that, from the first miracle at Cana in Galilee and from the later writings of St. John, that Jesus Himself is THE WEDDING. He is the wedding of Heaven and Earth. He is the wedding of God and Man.

In this parable of the endtime, Jesus is the Bridegroom.
The Bride of Christ is the Church.

As the Bride of Christ the Church longs for the final consummation of her heavenly wedding. She longs for the return of Christ. If she doesn't then there is something seriously wrong with her. If there is no aspect in her daily living which is preparing and prepared always for Christ then she has lost the plot. As the Church, the Bride of Christ, we have always to be about His business in the here and now BUT always to see it in the context of eternity, the final consummation of the destiny of Man. That means being prepared.

The maidens, the virgins are all prepared – no fault there. But some are better prepared than others. The wise ones have made contingency for delay. They are more than prepared. For the early church the question was a constant one – when would Jesus return and take His Bride to Heaven.

Today, two thousand years on, very often as Christians we do not think very much about this promised reality. How prepared are we for the coming of Christ at the end of time? How prepared are we for His coming at the end of our time. Have we put as much into this preparation as we do for the increasingly elaborate preparations for our all too human celebrations? In my experience most people spend more time planning their summer holiday or Christmas extravaganza than preparing for their eternity.

But what of the virgins. The wise ones have back up against the delay – time is more flexible in the middle east and the celebrations longer. They are not going to run out. And it seems curious to us that they won't help out their less prepared sisters. The truth is, of course, that they can't. On a practical level the long night time procession and party will be better with five long burning lamps than ten which go out halfway. But in a spiritual context the loan is impossible. The oil, a sign of the anointing with the Holy Spirit,

cannot be borrowed. You cannot borrow someone else's relationship with God. You have to have that relationship yourself. You cannot borrow spiritual character. You have to acquire it yourself. You cannot always live off the spiritual capital of someone else's prayers.

The question to the Church, to us, in all this set of parables is a simple but profound one. Are you ready for the coming of Jesus?

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