

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2020

A teenaged boy was having some girl problems and he was really frustrated. One night he decided to talk to the Lord. He began by asking, “God, why did you make girls so beautiful to look at?” God answered, “So you would love them, My son.” Then the boy asked, “God, why did you make girls so soft and cuddly?” God answered, “So you would love them, My son.” Finally in frustration the boy asked, “But God, why did make them so dumb?” God answered, “So they would love YOU, My son.”

In the time of Jesus marriages were arranged by family elders and kept within the families. First there was the betrothal period that took place in the home of the bride's family. The bride would stay in her father's house until the groom came to claim her and take her to his home. When all was settled the wedding party would process to the groom's home and begin the feasting. The ten young women in today's parable were not bridesmaids, but would have been relatives and friends of the groom. They were expected to go out to greet the bridegroom.

The parables are slice-of-life stories that the people of Jesus' time could relate to. To get his message across Jesus uses parables to engage the listener's imagination; as we listen to the parable, we visualize the unfolding of the scene. Each parable usually has one main focus. In today's parable, for example, we might ask, “why don't the wise ones share with those in need?” One thing seems clear, Jesus' purpose in telling the parable is not to make a point about sharing or being charitable. He has something else in mind. By running out of oil, the 5 foolish virgins were not able to complete their task of lighting the way for the wedding party. Also, they were not able to enjoy the celebration—they got their too late.

Today's parable is about taking care of ourselves. We are reminded of how serious it is to nurture our relationship with God and others by giving enough attention to the physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs that we all have. We need to check the oil on a regular basis, making sure that we are not running on empty. Just imagine if you don't pay attention to the low oil indicator in your vehicle. In life, if we are not careful and attentive, it's very easy to end up running on empty, especially when we are called to care for others. If or when that happens, we end up not being helpful to anyone. Like the 5 foolish virgins, we can't do our job and we also end up on the outside of enjoying what life is all about. It usually doesn't happen all at once. It happens a little at a time. All of a sudden we realize that we are very tired, unhappy or sick. Resentment or anger sets in; you snap or bark in a way that makes you feel bad after. We start to drink too much or we begin to eat too much or not enough—the joy is gone. We don't feel like doing anything. We call it burn-out which is a nice way of saying depressed. We are in a state of dis-ease.

During these days, we have to pay special attention to ourselves and what is going on within us and around us. We don't want to end up out of gas, disheartened or overly discouraged.

The remedy is usually just a matter of planning, of getting away for a brief time of rest and enjoyment and little more quiet prayer time; you can then return renewed in strength and enthusiasm. Remember even though the mission of Jesus was critical and even though he didn't have a whole lot of time here on earth, he got away on a regular basis; sometimes by himself; sometimes with the disciples; sometimes to go to Bethany and hang out with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. It is not a sign of weakness to get away for a while—it is wise and prudent and usually helps us to be a better minister and care-giver. It's easy to try and be like the Duracell Rabbit and just keep going and going and going—how does he end up? Going in circles.

Jesus' mission was to share himself with others and invite them into a relationship that would allow them to have an experience of the love of God. He accomplished his ministry in many different ways, but the heart of the ministry remained the sharing of himself. That is what he wanted to get across to his disciples and how he wanted them to continue his ministry.

We are those disciples. In carrying on the mission of Jesus, there are the practical and necessary things that have to be done for and with others, but always in the context of the mutual sharing of ourselves. That is the real gift. Another important point is that when we care for others, sometimes we forget that we need to allow the people we care for to care for us. Maybe that can't do in the way we do for them, but we need to be open to what they have to share with us—ministry is not one-sided.

Again, if we are running on empty, and there is no oil, our what we do can become just a job and we just move from one thing to the next. Speaking from my own personal experience, every once and a while, if I'm not careful, I can fall into that trap and I need to begin to take better care of myself, whether it be physically, spiritually, or emotionally. I'm sure we can all relate to this in one way or another. As we think of our life-situations, and as we get closer to the holiday and holy day seasons, let us make time we need to make sure our oil level is where it should be so that our spiritual, physical and emotional engines run smoothly. May the oil of God's peace fill your hearts.