

Parish of the Divine Love

Sermon Sunday November 8, 2020

Amos 5: 18-24; Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Matthew 25: 1-13

The tragedy of the unprepared life

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Dear people of God,

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Church focuses on the theme of Christ's coming. It is indeed appropriate that we should end the year with this theme since the whole Christian journey is to enter the kingdom of Christ by welcoming Him, our bridegroom into our lives. In simple faith language, we await to enter heaven so that we can be with Christ forever. However, such an understanding can be misleading. For very often when we speak of Christ's coming, many of us only think of His second coming at the end of time or at the end of our life on earth. Certainly, this is one aspect of Christ's coming.

However, the other dimension of Christ's coming is equally important and cannot be forgotten, which is the fact that Christ is coming every moment into our lives. It is His coming that is experienced in our encounters with our fellow human beings, in our history and in our life struggles, be it an experience of joy or sorrow; failure or success; grace or sin. Whenever we allow our daily events and experiences to be moments of encounter with our deeper self and with God, then we can certainly speak of His coming into our lives. It is only when we are able to encounter God in such little comings that we can be prepared for His final coming. For if we are unable to see Him already in the present events in our lives, how would we be able to see Him when He comes definitively and finally?

Perhaps, precisely because many of us have forgotten that Christ is coming each day already in our lives, that we view the second coming of Christ with dread and fear. Indeed, if we, as Christians, believe that this life is only a pilgrimage, then it would seem contradictory that we have such fears, since our whole goal and destiny in life is to be one with Christ. Such fear resembles the fear of the Thessalonians which we read in today's second reading. Like them, we grieve "like other people who have no hope."

Our expectation of Christ's coming should be like that of a joyous surrender upon our arrival at where we truly belong and with whom we really want to be with; namely, the kingdom of God our Father and to be with Christ, His angels and His saints. It is with such thoughts as these, St Paul says, that "you should comfort one another." Hence, our expectation towards the second coming of Christ should therefore make us alert to His daily coming into our lives already, since there is an intrinsic relationship between the final coming and His coming to our lives each day.

Consequently, it is necessary that if we were to be ready for Christ's second coming, we must already make ourselves sensitive to His little comings at each moment in our lives each day. We must, in the words of Christ, "Stay awake" because we do not know either the day or the hour when Christ will come to us disguised in our neighbors or in the ordinary events of our lives. Thus, it becomes necessary for us to purify ourselves in truth and in love. This preparation is necessary so that we will find Christ and His kingdom does not alien to us, but we will be at home immediately when we are there.

It is within this context that the parable of the 10 bridesmaids is important for all of us. We are called to imitate the wise bridesmaids and not repeat the same mistakes of the five foolish bridesmaids. We are warned firstly of the tragedy of being too late. This is the greatest tragedy of life – too late. There are certain things in life that we need to prepare before it is too late. It is certainly too late to begin to study on the night before the exam. It is certainly too late to go for treatment when one finds himself already advanced in cancer. It is certainly too late to be a moral and upright person at our deathbed when we have been selfish and revengeful throughout our lives. It is certainly too late to be able to let go when we cannot even let go of small things in life. Yes, it is certainly too late to be able to be with Christ when we do not know Him throughout our lives. If we do not make an act of faith in Christ in small things, how can we surrender our whole life at the point of death?

Secondly, we are warned of the tragedy of over-dependence. We must realize that there are certain things in life that cannot be borrowed or shared. There are certain things in life that we have to do by ourselves. This is true, especially in a relationship. We cannot borrow a relationship from someone. We need to create a relationship by ourselves. Similarly, we cannot borrow a character from someone. We need to build our own personal character. Virtues such as generosity, kindness, honesty, truthfulness, wisdom, compassion, or love cannot be borrowed but must be cultivated by ourselves. No! We learn and cultivate our character through experience and reflection. At most, we can imbibe such virtues from others. That is why, when the foolish bridesmaid wanted to borrow oil from the wise bridesmaid, they found that such oil could not be loaned.

Thirdly, the parable of the bridesmaids warns us of the tragedy of complacency. The bridesmaids knew very well that they should bring extra oil with them. They would have known the circumstances of their time. But instead of being prudent and bringing extra oil, they were too lazy to carry them. They were irresponsible and took things too lightly. In the same way too, there are some of us who take our life and faith too lightly. There are those of us who do not look after their health, eating carelessly and greedily whilst expecting God to protect us from all sicknesses. Then there are those workers who do not work conscientiously and meticulously. As a result, they cause their fellow colleagues or their company to suffer losses, whether of time or money. Most of all, many of us take our faith too lightly. We never bother to nurture our faith, whether spiritually or intellectually. We hardly spend time in relationship with God in prayer or do some spiritual reading or attend religious update classes. As a result, our faith is stunted and thus when crises set in, we lose faith completely and become resentful of God.

Yes, today, the liturgy is asking us not to act foolishly like the five foolish bridesmaids. We must therefore pray for the wisdom that comes from Christ and His Spirit. As the hymn goes, we need to pray for more oil, which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We need to pray for the unction of wisdom, the oil that empowers us to love, the oil that enlightens us in the truth, and the oil that heals us of our sicknesses, physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual. Hence, it is to Christ who sends us His Holy Spirit that we should seek for this oil. Unless we carry this oil of the Spirit of Jesus with us, we will not be ready to welcome Him when He comes in the dark moments of our lives. But with the oil of the Holy Spirit in us, our hearts and eyes will be lighted up with faith, hope and love and thus we will be able to see His presence accompanying us at every moment in our lives, especially when we arrive at the last stage of our journey on this earth. For those of us who have this oil, alive or at death, we already belong to the Lord and are with Him, now and forever. **Amen!**

