

St Pius-St Anthony 32nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Flashlights (handheld) come in all shapes and sizes now. But when I was a kid all the flashlights were basically just the round cylinder-shape lights, about the size of whatever battery went inside of it to power it; they were steel tubes, aluminum tubes or plastic tubes with one little bulb at the front head with several batteries lined up like train cars behind it in the cylinder. That was it (*if you were lucky you might had a fancy heavy duty 12 volt box-y style light, but those batteries cost so much more if I remember correctly-they were rarer*). My dad always had to remind me that no matter how strong the light was, or long lasting the batteries were, whenever I was fishing, if dropped it in the water, every one of them were all going out dead! But another little funny thing about those lights was why did it take us so long to realize we needed to make a flat side to the flashlight---how many times have I been under a car with a flashlight and as I lay it down on the drive, there it goes rolling off away and making me crawl back out to go get it. But, my point is how important having a personal light with you is when it comes to getting a job done or seeing clearly enough in the dark to identify yourself or someone else. And that is a crucial point in Jesus' parable today. It was necessary that each bridesmaid had her own lamp (lighted, wick trimmed and with enough oil). The wise bridesmaids came prepared with extra oil (*as if they had been to a wedding before that didn't start on time. Does that ever happen?*) But the bridesmaids' role was the introductory or 'welcome party' portion of wedding to meet and receive the honored groom and attendants, much like we see today in traditional processions at weddings. So, just like a bridesmaid need sot keep up with her bouquet today before the wedding march begins, so then it was most important to keep your light-candle-lamp burning to honor and receive the honored groom at night as in this parable. But some bridesmaids here, were not ready and came up short when the groom finally arrived (*this would be like trying to make the last leg of your road trip on the ¼ tank gas you feel sure will get you home, UNTIL you run into a 'standstill traffic jam' in summer and realize that even without the air conditioner you can't idle but for about 30 minutes before running out of fuel. Like the foolish bridesmaids, now I realize I should have filled up earlier to be ready for such unforeseen delays.*) These lamps were part of the honor procession, receiving the groom and providing a lighted parade into the wedding celebration. The unpreparedness of the bridesmaids (*disappointing, and dare I say 'dishonoring' the wedding party with aa weaker, small light show*) reflects badly upon the dignity of the groom's procession coming in which may account for some of that unhappy refusal of the bridesmaids being turned away at the door, but I also like to think that the lamp was a vital personal identification device in those times. I suggest that in the days of no universal electricity- to have any light, you had to carry it yourself. Your lamp or torch was your personal ID and protection; to show your face and be recognized. So when the unprepared

bridesmaids show up late, (*the parable really doesn't say whether they got oil or not at the merchants--which makes me wonder how safe it was to do business at midnight with anybody?*), I figure that their lamps are out, or too dimmed or burning badly due to cheap oil, and that leads to the scary proclamation from inside the door that **'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.'** (Matthew 25:13). They are not getting in because they are not recognized. In the groom's defense, he can say, "Everyone I invited knew to meet me on the road in with lights and so we all came in. By the way, I can't even see you in this dark to recognize you". This check at the door also prevented the freeloading wedding crashers from ruining the celebration by jumping in only for the free buffets and free drinks!

Now, I know some people point out about this parable that it doesn't seem very Christian about the other bridesmaids that they didn't share their oil with their sisters. Why not spread the resources among them all? But I have to think that ***Jesus is saying that there are some things in life that each person has to do for themselves.*** Each person has to decide/commit for themselves. We can help and speak to others, or try to teach, but when it comes to acting on something, they have to step up and take action themselves. For example, I cannot eat for another person (I may want to and we can joke about that!). For example, I know it may be gross, but I had an older friend that I was sitting by at a fundraiser dinner joke with me about this very thing. It was a prime rib dinner (but not so prime). It was pretty tough meat. He leaned over and said, "I don't know if you will take me up on this or not, but I'd pay someone I liked to half chew this meat and soften it up for me so I could finish it off!" Oh, no, there went my appetite, but the toughness of the meat had me wrapping up the night looking for the dessert plate! But back to the parable, here there are some things like the lamp that since it was a person's own ID, it had to be kept lighted oneself. Each person had to have his/her own lamp on this occasion. Also though, another factor preventing the late-sharing of oil might have been the danger of fire spilling out on them all. For example, the lamps are lighted, and as the night wore in if the wise bridesmaids had already added their extra oil, then consider the danger of taking already heated-up, odd shaped lamps and riskily pouring oil from one lamp to another in the dim night. Sounds like a recipe for a bonfire of bridesmaids' dresses! So, the oil and lamp needed to be prepared. It had to be taken care of and held by personally by each bridesmaid already. So, what is the lesson for us from this parable. If today the Lord returned, would we be found prepared with our lamp lighted and some back-up oil at the ready? He is coming back, or we are going to Him sometime, likely the most unexpected time. So, are we ready to do our part in order to be recognized by Him at the door? Will Jesus welcome us into the heavenly wedding banquet?