

[Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16: 63; 1 Thess.4:13-18; Matt. 25:1-13]

Boy, this has been some week, huh? I didn't know which was going to last longer: the pandemic, or counting the votes for President!

Now that the dust seems to have settled, where do we go from here? We still fight for life. We still fight for religious freedom of assembly AND expression in the public square. Finally, we remember that our American citizenship is temporary. Our heavenly citizenship is forever! And we continue the campaign of living like Christ, so that we may end up in Heaven. Because as He tells us in today's Gospel, we do not know the day or the hour!

Here is a more contemporary version of the Gospel we just heard.

At an adventure camp for teens, the campers were divided into teams to test their camping skills. When the earnest instructor tried to demonstrate safety practices, one group of guys sitting behind him mimicked him and spent their time laughing and joking. After they got their gear, these guys ran ahead to grab the best spot -- a rock ledge that hung over the lake.

They didn't bother to set up their tents. One of the guys discovered it was cool to light the "Blue Tip" matches off his teeth, his belt, his boots, or other guys' jeans, and then flip the lit match over the ledge and into the water, where it would make a hissing sound. Every guy in the group thought this was great, and they fought over the box of matches, spilling some into the lake, and lighting the rest until they were all gone.

Night came faster than they expected. Soon it was dark. And cold. And they had no firewood. And no fire. And no matches. They called out to other groups down the shore and asked for matches, but those groups had seen them flicking all their matches into the lake and simply laughed.

The woeful group sat in the darkness, slapping away mosquitoes and watching the campfires that flickered all around the shoreline in the distance. One of them asked, "Do you think we could start a fire with a lightning bug?"

Today's readings speak of wisdom, the end times and to be prepared.

When I am ready to leave my man-cave for another day of ministry and service, I still ask the Holy Spirit to give me the wisdom to make the right decisions, to say the right words and to act as Jesus would have me act. I still ask for “an understanding heart” when confronted with the day’s challenges.

During the month of November, Catholics turn their thoughts and reflections to the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. St. Paul adds his “Nick”el’s Worth about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in today’s Second Reading. Are we ready for that day? What will that look like? Because as Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel: we do not know the day or the hour.

Trying to figure out all of this, and trying to cope with all of life’s trials with the endurance of faith, we have a powerful advocate in Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Of all Mary’s many, many titles, I have some favorites. One of them is Mary, Untier of Knots. Because that’s usually what I need her for. A mom to get me out of jams. After all, she’s like the wise virgins ready with oil for their lamps for the unexpected arrival of the bridegroom, while I’m like the ones running last minute to get some. I turn to Mary, Untier of Knots for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing. I pray that I may be utterly released and unburdened. In that moment, I like to thank Mary for helping me to work through the knots I create in my life and for always giving me the sweet relief of her unbounded love for untying the knots given to me by others or by life itself.

St. Bonaventure once wrote: “When Mary holds you up, you do not fall; when she protects you, you need not fear; when she leads you, you do not tire; and when she is favorable to you, you arrive at the harbor of safety.

What are YOUR most reliable sources of wisdom? Do you seek out these resources (human and otherwise) as often as you should?

In what ways do you understand the end times to be NOW? As you wait for the coming of the Lord, in what ways do you see the Lord is already near and feel the Lord's presence?

When I was a child, our parish priest used to say, "Don't wait till you die to go to Heaven." This is the spirit of end-times that won't occur only at the end of the line. Purgation, preparing our souls for Heaven, is something we consciously

choose now, just as we might also choose the way of justice, peace, joy, gratefulness, humility, and love. We don't have to worry about the so-called Rapture, salvation and damnation, Heaven and Hell, and what's going to happen after we die. What rightfully concerns us is the choices we're making in the present hour, the oil we have in our lamps today, and whether we carry the Bridegroom in our hearts. If we are in Christ TODAY, we are in Christ forever.
AMEN!