

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 12, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *Lord God, in today's Gospel, you call us to be always ready for your coming. Help us to develop a spirit of vigilance. Be with us as we share our lives and listen to your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence and action in your life?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Wise people make God the center of their lives and are prepared for God's unexpected coming. In the first reading, personified Wisdom comes to those who are morally attuned and prepared to receive her. The Gospel speaks about the importance of readiness for God's visitation. In the second reading, Paul speaks about the fate of those who die before the Lord's return.

If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

FIRST READING: Wisdom 6:12-16

For the ancient Israelites, "wisdom" means much more than "intelligence" and "knowledge." It is all one needs to live a happy and fruitful life. In this reading, Wisdom is personified as a woman who is ready to help all who seek her. The wise person seeks the company of Lady Wisdom who is only too willing to "make herself known" to all. The relationship between Wisdom and the one who seeks her is reciprocal. The seeker seeks out Lady Wisdom but she also hastens to make herself known in anticipation of human desires.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 63

This psalm is a beautiful song of one seeking a relationship with Divine Wisdom. Having this relationship is "greater than life" which reminds us that life without God and his love is no life at all.

SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 4:13-18

Expectations of the return of Christ, his Second Coming, are ripe in this Christian community. Many believe that Jesus will return in their lifetime. Disappointment sets in when it does not happen. Anxiety sets in when loved ones start to die. What will become of them? Paul seeks to address these concerns in these verses.

First, he tells the Thessalonians that they should not act as if they had no hope. Belief in the Resurrection implies that if we die with Christ, we shall rise with him. Mourners should temper their grief with hope.

Having assured his readers that believers—living and dead—will live forever with Christ, Paul tries to describe *how* the Second Coming will happen. Fundamentalist Christians interpret these verses literally and believe that Paul is giving us an *exact* account of *how* Christ will return. Their interpretation is known as the "rapture," which means "being caught up." Most, if not all mainline churches see Paul's words as largely *symbolic*. He draws on the imagery of the prophet Daniel to express an indescribable theophonic (divine) experience. As Catholics, we would say that we do not know the *when, how or where* of Christ's Second Coming. We just believe that Christ *will* return and all the faithful who have ever lived and believed will enjoy his presence for all eternity.

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

Scholars tell us that many of Jesus' parables have two or more levels of meaning to them. The first level is the *intended* meaning for the *original* audience. In the original audience, the *wise* ones are those who hear and embrace the message of Jesus. The *foolish* ones are those who close their hearts to his message. At the *second level*, the intended audience is Matthew's own community (living some 40+ years later). His fellow Jews, who choose not to receive Jesus (the bridegroom) or the church, are the *foolish and unprepared bridesmaids*. But others, mainly Gentiles, accept the message of Jesus as preached by the early Christians. These are regarded as wise.

At a *third level*, the parable is used by Matthew to teach a lesson about *vigilance* to *all* believers. Here

the wise ones are those believers who keep their lamps trimmed in preparing to meet Jesus by daily hearing and keeping of his Word. The 'foolish' ones are those who hear Jesus' message but do not act on it, just like the man who builds his house on sand and has nothing to fall back on in time of crisis. The Gospel ends with a warning for all readers. Since no one knows the day or hour of Jesus' return, all would be wise to sustain an attitude of continuous preparedness.

Some of us may criticize those who had oil for failing to share with those who had no oil. Scholars point out: the parable is *not* about compassionate giving to those without. It is a call to personal readiness for the Lord's return. "*Stay awake for you do not know the day nor the hour.*"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image in the readings spoke to you most? Why?
2. What is your definition or description of wisdom? How can we grow in wisdom?
3. How differently would you live your life if you knew that you had only six months to live?
4. What can help us to remain vigilant for the Lord's comings into our lives?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday's readings. Suggestion: This week, be more vigilant and attentive to how God may be trying to get through to you in the events and encounters of your daily life. ©

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Save the Date!!

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!