

Matthew 25:1-13^{v vi}

Jesus said to his disciples: "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

^v About the Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

Today's reading comes from the fifth great discourse (chaps. 24-25). In response to the disciples' questions about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of our world, Jesus prepares the disciples for life without his earthly presence. His parable of the 10 bridesmaids provides guidelines for Christian behavior until Jesus returns in glory.

The bridegroom represents the Messiah, and the community is like the 10 bridesmaids. The wise bridesmaids and the foolish ones both slept, but the latter's lack of forethought betrayed their true character. Declaring that he didn't know the bridesmaids, the bridegroom reveals that they had never been his friends, though they were in the bridal party. Here Matthew again emphasizes his parallel themes of ethical consistency and personal relationship: words matter less than obedience, which demonstrates genuine love.

vi Reflection and Response

Today's readings emphasize the importance of all our actions, reminding us to reverence God's ongoing revelation in the text of our lives. In the eternal design, every moment counts and no decision is trivial.

We often make a quick choice: "I'm late for the wedding; I don't have time to stop for gas now." Yet the five women in the gospel who made that decision discovered it had unforeseen ramifications. So when we ignore opportunities to serve, dismiss small kindnesses and indulge ourselves in little forms of selfishness, we do not guess how large the implications of our thoughtlessness might be.

The other side of the coin is also true: we cannot gauge the effects of our positive actions. A kind word, an hour spent listening, the extra effort put into preparing a meal or perfecting a work: all these can have incalculable impact. Some spiritual writers who know the importance of the seemingly insignificant call it "the sacrament of the present moment."

In the present moment are also contained the deaths and risings that constitute the essence of Christian life. The letter to the Thessalonians can refer not only to the final physical death, but also to the little deaths that precede it. The relationship we had neglected, the friendship we thought fractured, the romance supposed impossible, the career that seemed ended, the child we'd given up on, the health that seemed lost: all these have a miraculous way of resurrecting. Our faith calls us to see death and rising not as one final action, but as a continuous process culminating in eternal life.

The clarity with which we hold to that vision assuages even our worst griefs. How utterly hopeless a funeral would be if it were not for the words of Paul that sustain us in grief. Even the firmest believer undergoes devastating suffering when a loved one dies: read C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed* for proof.

"We will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:17), Paul promises. And on that hope we stake our lives.

Quietly consider: What unforeseen consequences—either positive or negative—did a recent decision have?
