

As we enter the last three weeks of the liturgical year, our Lord through the Church's liturgy turns our minds to a very important topic: preparation for the coming of Christ. In this week's Gospel we hear the parable of the wise and prudent virgins. In the parable ten virgins or bridesmaids are awaiting entrance to the great wedding feast. The bridegroom is delayed, and they all fall asleep until suddenly, in the middle of the night, the groom comes to welcome them into the banquet. The only problem is, to find their way to the feast they need oil lamps and sufficient oil to keep them burning. As it turns out, five of the ten were "foolish" because they did not bring oil for their lamps. These were excluded from the feast while the five "wise and prudent" virgins who had prepared themselves for this moment with sufficient oil were able to enter into the feast. The moral of the story is clear: be prepared to meet the bridegroom (Jesus) when He comes! Certainly, this parable applies to the moment of our death and our need to always be in a state of grace because death may come to us at any time. But I would suggest there is another application as well. As we all know, life often brings times of trial, suffering, darkness. At these times—in the "middle of the night"—it is easy for us to lose sight of the way to the "feast." Sometimes it can be challenging to find and follow the Bridegroom, Jesus, in the middle of the night. For this, we must be prepared beforehand.

The question arises: how do we prepare for the sudden and sometimes devastating trials of life? How can we find the Bridegroom in the middle of the night? If we want to be counted among the "wise and prudent" disciples of Christ, we need to fill our oil stocks everyday with at least these three things:

1) Prayer. Daily quiet time with God. We must schedule it; calculate a way to keep it habitually, daily, in our lives even if it means depriving ourselves of other things. This is not optional.
2) Spiritual reading or study. If we are not daily nourishing our minds with the truth of our faith we can rest assured that are defenses are weakening – we are running out of oil and may find ourselves unable to see when our faith is put to the test.
3) Examination of conscience and Confession. We need to daily reflect on our sins and ask for God's mercy. At the same time, we need to daily reflect on our blessings and any good we may have done in order to give thanks and praise to God. Daily examination of conscience and periodic sacramental Confession are essential for our preparation to enter the feast with our Lord.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, but I believe if we consider the life of any Saint, we will certainly find these three elements habitually present in their daily routine. As we prepare to meet our Bridegroom and enter into the feast of eternal life, may the good Lord help us to be "wise and prudent," to keep our oil flasks full, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that we will never lose sight of our beloved Bridegroom, even when He comes in the middle of the night.

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples