

## The Parable of the Ten Virgins (32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

### Wisdom 6:12-16—Wisdom is Found by Those who Seek Her

1. Lady Wisdom: “wisdom” (*sophia*) is found by those who “love” (*agapaō*) her (6:12)
2. Diligence: “he who rises early to seek her” will “find her” (6:14)
3. Contemplation: “to fix one’s thought on her is perfect understanding” (6:14)

### Psalm 63—My Soul is Thirsting For You, O God

1. Longing for God: “My soul” “thirsts” for you, “O God” (v. 1)
2. Prayer Vigil: “I think of you upon my bed” (v. 6)
3. Meditation: I “meditate” “in *the watches of the night*” (v. 6)

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18—The Dead in Christ will Rise First

1. The *Parousia* of Christ: “The dead in Christ will rise first” (4:16)

### Matthew 25:1-13—The Parable of the Ten Virgins

1. Context: ancient Jewish Wedding Customs
  - a. Betrothal Period: up to a year long; live separate after taking vows
  - b. Wedding Procession: Bridegroom takes Bride to wedding feast
  - c. Week-long Wedding Feast (cf. John 2:1-12)
2. Five Foolish Virgins: took “no oil” with them
3. Five Wise Virgins: took “flasks of oil” with their “lamps” (may actually be ‘torches’)
4. Coming of “the Bridegroom” (Cf. Is 54:5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:14-20)
  - a. He comes at “midnight”
  - b. They are called to “come out and meet him”
  - c. Five Wise Virgins: “trimmed their lamps”
  - d. Five Foolish Virgins: “give us some of your oil...”
5. First Twist: Five Wise Virgins’ refusal to share their oil
  - a. “Perhaps there will not be enough”
  - b. “Go to the dealers and buy...” at *midnight*?!
6. Second Twist: Bridegroom’s rejection of the Five Foolish Virgins:
  - a. Entry into “the marriage feast”; door is “shut”
  - b. Entreaty: “Lord, lord, open to us”
  - c. Response: “Truly I say to you, I do not know you” (25:12; cf. Matt 7:21-22)
7. *Nimshal*: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (25:13)

### St. Augustine: the “Oil” of “Good Works”

They are both virgins, and yet half are rejected. It is not enough that they are virgins but that they also have lamps. They are virgins by reason of abstinence from unlawful indulgence of the senses. But they have lamps by reason of good works. Of these good works the Lord says, “Let your works shine before men, that they may see your good

works and glorify your father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Again he said to his disciples, “Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning” (Luke 12:35). In the “girded loins” is virginity. In the “burning lamps” is good works. (Augustine, *Sermon* 93.2; trans. in M. Simonetti, p. 217)

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection (32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Both the Wisdom of Solomon and Psalm 63 connect seeking after God with “rising early” to pray and keeping vigil/meditating “in the watches of the night.” What time is your regular prayer? Do you take time to meditate on Scripture each day? Do you pray better in the morning, or late at night?

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2. Why does Jesus continually describe the Kingdom of Heaven as a wedding banquet? What does this image suggest to you about the joy of the kingdom? What does it suggest about the pain of being ‘left out’?

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3. If Augustine is right and the “oil” represents good works, why does Jesus say “I never knew you”? What is the relationship between our “good works” and “knowing” Christ?

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## For Further Study

1. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), pp. 318-21: an excellent, concise discussion of the Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins.
2. Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 214-220. Excellent collection of patristic comments on Matthew’s Gospel. Extremely illuminating.