

Sunday Homily

3RD SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

8 NOVEMBER 2020

YEAR A

“Keep awake therefore, for you know
neither the day nor the hour.”

Matthew 25:13

Illustration

The family was on holiday and the children were sleeping in a strange room. “Daddy, I can’t get to sleep,” came the mournful cry of the five-year-old daughter.

“Well... try counting sheep in a big field, jumping over a small hedge,” came the father’s tired response.

The parents stood outside the child’s room and listened to their daughter say quietly, “One sheep in a big field jumping over a small hedge. Two sheep in a big field...” and so on. When the child had reached ten they crept away, smiling. After a few minutes there was another cry from the child’s room. “Daddy!” by now the little girl was crying. “Daddy, I can only count up to twenty-nine!”

Gospel Teaching

It is only with greater wisdom and careful teaching that we, any of us, learn to count beyond twenty-nine. However, there’s an element in all Christians that is like the child trying to get to sleep. The foolish bridesmaids in today’s Gospel reflect this attitude – they couldn’t see beyond the oil in their own lamps. They hadn’t thought what would happen if the oil ran out so they had seen no need to take precautions. It is easy for us with hindsight to say they were foolish not to do so, but they didn’t know how long they would have to wait.

Today we are called to wait with hope for the coming of Christ, using the wisdom brought to us by the scriptures. We are encouraged to stay awake because we don’t know either the day or the hour – we don’t know how long we will have to wait. It could be five minutes, or it could be five thousand years. The foolish bridesmaids are an example to us in this – they had prepared, but they hadn’t prepared enough. Their horizons were limited. Perhaps they expected it to be five minutes. The wise bridesmaids, on the other hand, had brought extra reserves of oil. They were open-minded in their preparations and so they were able to light the way of the bridegroom.

Christ calls each one of us to open our eyes to all that’s going on around us and be ready. We can be comforted by the words from the book of Wisdom which point out that “...one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care.” Then

the letter to the Thessalonians encourages us to remain in a state of readiness because, in that way, we will surely meet the Lord: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” We may not know the day or the hour, but what we do know is that it is within our power to be always ready to meet the Lord.

Application

So, how do we prepare to meet the Lord; how do we make ourselves ready? Unfortunately it isn't enough just to recite a quick prayer of repentance every night before we fall to sleep. We are called to respond with our whole lives. All of our actions can reflect a state of readiness. Every action, from driving carefully through a built-up area to reconciling differences between family and friends, needs to demonstrate our state of readiness.

Are there relationships in our lives that are in need of healing? Are there things we need to say to people that we keep putting off? We must not be fooled into thinking we have all the time in the world to sort our lives out – the message of today's Gospel is clear: we do not know how long we have got. It could be that Christ will come again today, or it could be that we will meet our own death. It is not morbid to be prepared for death; it is a sensible and faithful thing to do, because, whatever we think about it, we cannot avoid the fact that we are all going to die.

Are we like the wise bridesmaids – open-minded and fully prepared? Or like the foolish bridesmaids – with pockets of our lives untouched by the Gospel message; not prepared enough? If we are fully prepared then that extra effort in our communities, like the extra flask of oil, will transform our world – brightening all that is around us. Let us encourage one another to be so prepared and to strive to live lives of love and peace with everyone.