

THIRTY SECOND  
SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



**Prayer**

*Psalm 63:2-8*

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

**Reading the Word**

*Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16*

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her.

She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.

One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate.

To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care, because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and

FIRST READING

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16

PSALM

Psalm 63:2-8

SECOND READING

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

GOSPEL

Matthew 25:1-13

the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

*Matthew 25:1-13*

Jesus said, "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

*Scripture quotations from  
New Revised Standard Version Bible:  
Catholic Edition, © 1989, 1993.  
Used with permission.*

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.

### Hearing the Word

#### “Prepare!”

The Gospel passages selected for the last three Sundays of the liturgical year feature the three final parables of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Matthew. Since the account of the passion follows immediately, they, in fact, conclude Jesus' entire public ministry. These parables focus on matters pertaining to Jesus' return at the end of time and present his teaching on the subject of a person's eternal destiny.

The first reading comes from the book of Wisdom. Generally, the word “wisdom” refers to the understanding and insight that enables a person to live well, and to achieve lasting happiness. However, the book of Wisdom features a unique way of describing wisdom by presenting it as a person, a woman. This “Lady Wisdom” reflects God's own self. She accompanied God when he created the world and shared some of God's unique attributes – she is “radiant and unfading”

(cf. Wis 7:25-26). By making wisdom a person and associating her closely with God at creation, the author teaches that God designed human life wisely, that is with the purpose of achieving the full and lasting happiness which can be achieved by following the paths of Lady Wisdom.

Wisdom does not come upon a person automatically but needs to be loved and sought after. This search must be so intense as to make one “rise early”. This implies that people must strive intensely to understand what the true goal and purpose of human life is according to God's design. Having such understanding and modelling one's life accordingly makes a person truly wise.

The author's statements also imply that the very act of searching for such wisdom makes a person already wise, because it testifies that he or she understands that serious reflection on life's true purpose and meaning is necessary. Such realization is, in itself, the beginning of Wisdom.

The second reading comes from the central part of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. One of the main reasons that Paul wrote this letter were doubts that the community members had regarding the fate of those who would die before Christ's return to the earth. The Thessalonians asked Paul whether those who had died before Christ's arrival would be at a disad-

vantage to those still alive at that moment.

Paul's answer to this question was brief and precise. He began by stating that the faithful must not “grieve” for those who have died, like those who have no “hope”. For Paul, hope means the assurance of eternal life with Christ which awaits the faithful after death. Christians can be certain that there is a common and glorious future that awaits them all.

Next, Paul describes what will happen at Christ's return. When he comes, both the dead and the living will rise together to meet him in the clouds, to escort him back to earth. This follows a formal procedure followed at the time for welcoming a distinguished and important person, such as a king or a governor, arriving to visit a city. To welcome him, the citizens of the town would go out to meet the visitor while he was still far away, and then escort him to their city in a festive procession. Applying this pattern, Paul states that the faithful, both those who have died and those still alive, will together meet the coming Lord “in the air”, which was the space halfway between heaven and earth.

Meeting Christ there, the faithful would escort Jesus down to the earth to be with him for ever. Paul understands “heaven” as the presence of Christ with his faithful on the earth, where God's kingdom belongs. Paul's words contain a striking and clear assurance

that the final human destiny lies in eternal life with Christ on the earth transformed into the “new heaven” at the end of times (cf. Rev 21:1-4).

The first of the three great parables that conclude Jesus’ public ministry is based on a story of a wedding feast. In the book of Revelation, Christ’s return to the earth is described as a wedding, with the “new Jerusalem” coming down to earth as a bride, and Christ’s coming called the “marriage of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7-9).

Today’s parable narrates the story of ten bridesmaids, five “foolish” and five “wise”. All were invited to the wedding feast, all experience the delay of the feast, and equally, all fell asleep. The only difference between them is that five were adequately prepared, having enough oil for their lamps, while the other five did not think ahead and ran out of oil. With the bridegroom approaching, those who lacked oil asked for help from those who had enough. However, the request was refused. In the end, the foolish bridesmaids were shut out and excluded from the wedding feast.

This parable symbolically describes human destiny and conveys a twofold message. First, people need to prepare for encountering the coming of the Lord – the bridegroom – at the end of time. This meeting is the inescapable and ultimate fate of all human beings. The wise ones know this, and prepare ade-

quately for that final encounter, whenever it happens. This is what Jesus meant by calling for “keeping awake”. The foolish ones also know about it, but do not sufficiently prepare for the final event.

The second important lesson is that each human being is personally responsible for making adequate preparations. The fact that the “oil” in the parable cannot be shared by the bridesmaids means that each person is responsible for their own fate. At the time of the final judgment, someone else’s work and efforts cannot be in any measure shared or relied on by others to make them welcome into God’s heavenly kingdom.

Today’s readings call for being wise with regard to death and its aftermath, by adequately preparing for those final and inescapable events. Initially, this wisdom consists in realizing that the ultimate human destiny lies in encountering God and Christ in eternity, as Paul stated with great clarity in the second reading. Those who prepare for that meeting adequately are wise, in that they know where their destiny and the focus for their lives lies. These are the “wise bridesmaids” who will be admitted to the wedding feast and will be known by Jesus, “the bridegroom”, because they prepared themselves adequately. This preparation always begins with careful reflection on one’s life, which Jesus called “keeping awake” and which

the Psalmist described in the words, “I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night”.

### **Listening to the Word of God**

Today we reflect on being prepared for eternity as Christians and as human beings. Generally speaking, preparation is about being focused. When a person is focused in life, they are able to define their purposes and goals clearly. They are not easily influenced or swayed by others because they know what they seek. The first reading calls such clarity wisdom.

In many societies, there is a common belief that the elders are the ones who have wisdom. Truly they do, and we see it in them because they have a lot of experience in life. Above all, they have had clear goals set, the goals which enabled them to achieve their purpose in life and be so successful as to gain recognition and respect. But wisdom does not come automatically with age. The journey to possess her begins in youth when we begin to make choices that will put us on a certain life path. As Christians, we have a great advantage of a good start because of our religious traditions and the Scripture, which inform us where the path to wisdom lies and guide our steps. A young person can be already be called wise when he or she makes choices thinking ahead and looking into a distant future, and considering

where the road taken will eventually lead.

The Gospel parable calls for being watchful and always prepared. The five wise bridesmaids were focused, knowing their role during the feast and prepared for any eventuality. For them, being a bridesmaid was not just all about waiting for the bridegroom to arrive, but it also entailed being responsible by doing what is necessary well ahead. Preparedness is all about thinking ahead and not allowing oneself to be negligent and lax. There is a saying among the Yoruba people of Nigeria saying that, "Where you will sit when you are old shows where you stood in your youth." It again evokes an attitude of preparing carefully and well and for the future. It also calls for carefully choosing where one eventually wants to arrive on the life journey.

As Christians we are called to embrace a difficult but basic truth of life that we are pilgrims on this earth and our time here is limited. Knowing this and taking it seriously we will look at life with full realization that every day and hour brings us closer to its end. As Christians, this is not a frightening and depressing perspective but a hopeful expectation of meeting with the Lord which is sure to occur. No one can run away or be exempted from this moment. We are called to be responsible by making adequate preparations for that encounter which awaits each

one of us. If we live our Christian vocation well, by following Christ diligently, and by living in imitation of him, we can be sure that our preparation for this meeting is going well, and we will not be found without oil in our lamps when we are summoned.

### Proverb

“Where  
you will  
sit when  
you are  
old shows  
where  
you stood  
in your  
youth.”

### Action

#### Self-examination

What are my goals in life? Am I working towards fulfilling them, or am I procrastinating in pursuing them?

Do I allow my friends or people around me to influence me negatively from doing what I am convinced is right? Am I firm in my decisions or do I allow others to decide for me?

### Response to God

In my personal prayer, I bring before God with thanksgiving all my friends and family members who have helped me to realize some of my goals and be the person I am today.

### Response to your World

I will set and focus on a particular goal that reflects some aspect of my Christian faith every day of the week, and pursue it diligently.

As a group, we will discuss the goals and purposes we have as a group. Do these help us to prepare better for the eventual meeting with our Lord, or are they simply about socializing and having good time together?

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of life that you have given to each one of us.

We thank you for giving us a clear purpose in life and eternal destiny in meeting you.

We thank you for our parents, school teachers, church leaders and friends who have contributed to making our lives what they are today.

May you continue to bless and protect them wherever they are. We ask this through Christ our Lord.