

Weekly Update from Father John 11-9-17

Dear members and friends of our parish family,

On this upcoming 23rd Sunday after Pentecost we begin what is sometimes known as the Advent before Advent, as these final three Sundays of the Church year point us to Christ's return and the incoming of God's kingdom. This Sunday, in Matthew's Gospel (25:1-13) Jesus offers, in response to his disciples' questions concerning when God's Kingdom will appear, the parable of the ten bridesmaids. The details of the story reflect the wedding customs of Palestine at the time of Jesus. On the date appointed for the wedding, the groom would go with an assembly of friends to take the bride from her family home and return with her, usually at night, to the new home the couple will share. This return of the groom with his bride would begin a festive celebration that would last for several days. There was no set time for the wedding party to return, and those left waiting had no way to predict when the groom and his bride would return.

As the parable begins, Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to ten bridesmaids with lanterns who await the return of the bridegroom so that they might light his way. The "wise" bridesmaids come prepared with extra oil for their lanterns; the "foolish" bridesmaids have brought no extra oil with them. As the time of arrival was delayed, the bridesmaids became drowsy and slept. At the arrival of the bridegroom is finally announced and the bridesmaids wake to meet him, but only those who brought extra oil are prepared and able to refill their lamps.

This parable would have been especially relevant to the community to whom Matthew was writing. Generally believed to have been written at least forty years after Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection, the Gospel of Matthew spoke to a community who was coming to grips with the fact that Jesus had not returned as soon as expected. This parable serves as a strong reminder that we must always be prepared for we know not the time Christ will return, and yet, we must remain steadfast in our hope.

Our reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians (4:13-18) offers words of encouragement as well, as Paul seeks to reassure the Thessalonians that even those faithful who die before Christ's return will be united with us as one in the Kingdom of Heaven. As we ponder these lessons, I invite you to consider what it means to be watchful and to be prepared for Christ's return. As illustrated in our scripture, this question has been with us since the Church's beginnings, and its reach has extended beyond the scope of scripture as it is often explored in popular books and films. Join our guest preacher and celebrant Fr. Tim Fleck this Sunday as he explores these very rich lessons.

We also look forward this Sunday to a stewardship talk from Chris Krenicki who will offer her witness to the importance of stewardship in our life together as disciples. I urge your continued prayers in discerning your 2018 pledge and in returning your pledge card before November 26. Please see my newsletter article for an expanded reflection on our call to be good stewards of God's gifts and how that call is grounded in a life of continual thanksgiving.

Faithfully,

John+