

DON'T WAIT UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE!

Matthew 25:1-13

A wedding in Palestine was an excuse for a super party. The people deserved it. Their lives were ones of working from sunrise to sunset. The saying "Thank God It's Friday!" would not mean anything to them.

The bride and groom didn't go to Bermuda for a honeymoon. They stayed home and hosted the mother of all wedding receptions for seven days. The overworked townspeople felt there could not be too many weddings.

Now the disappointment of the five bridesmaids without oil can be understood. The bridegroom had arrived unexpectedly. They went searching for oil. The doors were locked. They were shut out from the wedding. They were inconsolable.

We might think that these five foolish bridesmaids were treated badly. But they were not kids. They knew the rules. The parable reflects Palestinian customs. Even the most tragic effect of catastrophe can be avoided or minimized by proper preparation. But the sad thing in life is that many people can only realize the importance of preparation when it is already too late.

How many of you have ever run out of gas? Every year at least a half million people call for help because they have run out of gas. Besides flat tires, dead batteries, running out of gas ranks right up there in the reasons why people call for roadside service. One might understand this happening a generation ago, when gas gauges were not entirely accurate, and when all the warning lights of our day were non-existent. But now we have warning messages that our fuel is running low (giving us perhaps an hour more of driving), and then additional progressively urgent warnings indicating just how many estimated miles of driving we have left. One must say that most people who run out of fuel are "without excuse."

Why then, do we do it as often today as people did years ago, when all of the advantages of technology were not available? It is not gasoline that is lacking, but olive oil "the fuel burned in the lamps of Jesus' day." And the five foolish virgins did not really "run out" of oil; they never had it.

When I was in Florida this past Aug-Sep time frame visiting family. I was driving a rental SUV and I had just left my 'time share' with my oldest nephew and we were heading out to Tampa (about 2 ½ hours away).

We were to pick up my sister-in-law and her sister and go to lunch together...it was Thursday, Sep 7th, and I would be leaving the next day for home. Hurricane Irma would be on top of south Florida by Sunday evening. When everyone was in the car and I was driving southeast in the fast lane, I noticed quite the gas stations on the

left had many cars backed up onto the highway waiting to get gas. At that same instant, I heard a 'ping' and I looked at my own instrument panel to see the lighted picture of a gas pump and saw that my gas gauge registered **much less than 1/8 of a tank**, and I panicked...I forgot to check my gas gauge before I left Orlando. My sister-in-law was doing the 'back seat driving' routine and telling me to go across to the left and stop at a gas station. I told her that I was going to get in the right lane and pull off on my side of the road. I was really praying hard that I would not run out of gas before I found some place to refuel because I doubt I could have gotten AAA to come to my rescue.

After what seemed like an eternity, I saw a gas station on the right with only 3 cars stopped on the highway and I pulled in behind them. I prayed hard for some Divine intervention and it took a few minutes to get to the point where I could turn onto the driveway of the gas station. Though there was still a line of cars in front of me, the driveway was pointed down at about a 10 degree angle so I turned off the ignition. All I had to do now was release the brake to inch forward (**by this time, I was running on fumes**).

Those of us who run out of fuel wrongly suppose that we still have plenty of time to get it later. We should know when our gas gauge is low...good grief, we should see the flashing lights on the dash and heed the 'ping' of the warning bell. But we lull ourselves into thinking that there is still plenty of time to deal with the problem. There will surely be another gas station ahead, and not too far. This false confidence has gotten many people into trouble. Those who think they will have other chances to come to faith in Jesus are making a very dangerous assumption. Jesus' coming will be sudden and unexpected, and when He comes, all chances of changing our course will have been forfeited. The coming of the Christ will end our opportunity to turn to Him in faith, and it seals our doom.

The ten virgins, five wise and five foolish, are attendants at a wedding banquet, responsible to greet the groom when he arrives. When the groom arrives much later than expected and it is already evening, the five foolish ones are left without enough oil for their lamps. The five who brought extra oil are the ones who have heard the call to faith and who responded in a wise manner, preparing themselves for the task at hand. Their foresight in bringing extra oil served them well, and is intended to be a warning to all hearing the parable to imitate their alertness and wisdom. As we live out these reflective days of late autumn and look ahead to Advent, we should seek out wisdom as identified in our first reading so we might have no fear and be able to live the life we have at present with joyful hope of the life to come. (Father Edward Mazich, O.S.B.)

We have to always be ready, Jesus tells us. We don't know the hour of His return, and more than this, his coming will be at a time that we don't expect. We should not conclude that his return is in the distant future, nor assume that we'll will be given some forewarning, so that we'll have time to "clean up our act" in time.

The five foolish virgins had no oil for the very same reasons people continue to run out of gas, even when the flashing message on their instrument panel tells them they are about to run out. **We don't believe the warning signs. We don't think things are as bad as they are reported to be. "I must have more gas than that!" Or, "I've gotten this same message before, and I've always been able to get to the gas station before running out."**

Those of us who would run out of gas are lulled into a false confidence by the fact that everything appeared to be fine at the moment. The engine is running smoothly; there are no preliminary chugs or sputtering of the engine, so we feel confident in our choice not to purchase fuel.

Jesus told us that He would come at a time when we did not expect Him – even at a rather peaceful time when there are no indications of trouble ahead. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security.

The coming of our Lord was not to be immediate, as the disciples supposed, but at a much more distant time. But when He does come, it will be without warning, and at a time we don't expect Him. When He comes, our fate is sealed, and there will be no opportunity to change our minds then. We must always be prepared now (and from now on) by acknowledging our sinfulness, our helplessness, our need for salvation, and by trusting in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our place. Being ready means, among other things, trusting in Jesus, and having our sins forgiven.

We have to always be ready, Jesus tells us. My nighttime prayer is for a peaceful sleep in the night from worldly cares, but always to be constantly aware and vigilant of the need for prayer and watchfulness during the day. I don't want to be caught unawares or unprepared ever again.

We mustn't wait until the coming of Jesus to learn that we are not really saved? God wants us to know for certain that we are saved, to be fully assured that we are forgiven and that we have a salvation that is certain.

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