

*“...Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”* Vs. 13

For the sake of making a point, let's say that we did know the day and the hour. The day and the hour of Jesus' return. We do not. No one knows when the Bridegroom will return to lead home His bride. But say we did. Would we, in that case, be ready for His coming?

I do think that many would reply, “Yes, most certainly I would be ready if I knew the year, the month, the day, and the hour when I would meet Jesus in the end.” They might go on to say, “And then what a life I could lead! Living how I please. Neglecting the Word of God and His church until just before the day and the hour. Then I could repent and buy oil for my lamp in time to meet the Bridegroom.”

But does it work that way? Because I know of people, and so do you, who were facing death and still refused to repent. They knew that the day and the hour was upon them. It was not years away, nor even months. It was right then. Yet knowing this did not change them. Rather, it only hardened them and stiffened their neck even more.

But I also know of people, and so do you, who were facing death and did repent. God revealed to them that the day and the hour was fast approaching, and their lamp began to burn brightly, for the oil they needed was given to them, and just in time.

The thief on the cross is one such as these. Both he and the other thief were living like foolish virgins. And then it happened that they were both facing death at the same time. The day and the hour was upon them. The one simply dug in his heels. But the other did repent, and just in time to be ushered into the marriage feast with the Bridegroom.

So can we ignore this parable of Jesus? Because we have here in this Bible story a foolish virgin who was able to buy oil at the cry of midnight. But understand something... this parable of the Ten Virgins is not about these two thieves. It's not about thieves and criminals in general. It is not about those people who have lived their life apart from Christ and His church. The ten virgins are those who are in the church. They are the baptized. All ten have lamps of faith. All ten went through catechism class and were confirmed in the church. This parable is not a warning to the people of the world. It's a warning to Christians like you and me. It is not a warning to avoid gross sins and lead better lives or else. The warning is this: Be not so foolish as to think that the oil I have in my lamp is all that I need.

I cannot begin to count the number of church members over the years who, upon being encouraged to buy more oil for their lamps, held their lamp up and replied, “See my lamp? I have faith, and I will never lose my lamp. I'll be okay.”

What wise virgin would ever say that? Wise virgins do not point to their lamps, but to Jesus Christ. It's because wise virgins do not have faith in their lamps. They have faith in Jesus. And to have faith in Jesus is to always want more of Him. More of His words. More of His Sacrament. More grace, more gospel, more forgiveness.

Those who are wise virgins do not try to squeak into heaven with the least possible amount of oil for their lamps. That's like a husband asking his wife, "What is the least amount of love I need to give you? What is the bare minimum amount of time I have to be with you in order to stay married to you?" If a husband would never say these things to his wife, why would we act in such a way toward Jesus? "What's the least amount of time, Jesus, that I have to spend reading and hearing Your words? What is the bare minimum number of times I need to be in Your church, and receiving Your Sacrament, in order to enter with You into heaven?" Is this the mark of a wise virgin or a foolish one? Wise virgins do not count and number such things. They just act. They don't question what they have to do; they just do it.

Oh that we all were such wise virgins. But aren't we? We need to stop looking at how wise or foolish we think we are and simply throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. A wise virgin does not say to himself, or herself, "I am a wise virgin," but instead cries, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am a wretched sinner and I have acted foolishly."

It is only the foolish virgins who think they are wise. But who really is wise enough? Who really buys enough oil for their lamp? Who is it that does not fall asleep, but stays awake and watchful? Not me, and not you either. All ten virgins became drowsy and slept. All ten needed to be roused from sleep.

You will enter the marriage feast of heaven with the Bridegroom not because you have done your best to stay awake; not because you have done your best to be wise, but because you have a gracious God, my friend, who gave you to Jesus in your baptism, and who keeps giving you more of Jesus here in His words of life and at His table of grace.

Jesus became your Bridegroom by giving Himself up for you on the cross. Did He ask how much love He had to give you? Did He do the bare minimum for you? You know what He did. He gave everything. He did it all...for you, and you, and you. Whether you are wise, foolish, or in between, Jesus won for you a place at the marriage feast in heaven. All the foolishness in your past cannot lock you out. All that foolishness is forgiven. Every foolish and wretched thing you have done is forgiven. You are all forgiven.

To believe this is wisdom from God. To live it is wiser still. I cannot make any of you wise virgins. But I can give you oil for your lamp, God through me, so that when the day and the hour draws near, you will be ready to meet Jesus, your Bridegroom. Amen.