

Homily for Sunday, Nov. 8, 2020 – Feast of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity

As our liturgical year is drawing to an *end*, and we are on the cusp of beginning a new liturgical year in just a few weeks with Advent, our Scripture stories are more and more about the *end times*, or if you prefer the fancy, theological term “eschatology.” One thing I sense in these readings is that we are not to become obsessed with the questions of: “When will the Lord will return in glory?” nor with the question: “What will the Second Coming look like?” So, while the stories are about the end time, they seem to be saying to us, “Do not focus on the end time, otherwise we will miss what God is doing right here, right now, and we will miss what God is call us to right here, right now.” There is always a reason why things unfold in the world the way they do. And there is always an invitation to bring our faith to those unfolding events.

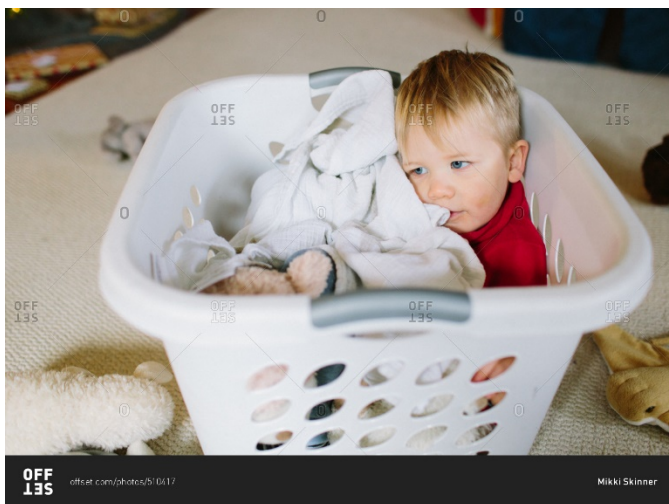
I know the gospel story of the wise and foolish bridesmaids has a strong invitation, but just when I think I have figured out that invitation, that challenge, within five minutes I realize I haven’t figured it out at all. So, here are a few scattered thoughts, and they really are scattered thoughts.

When the bridesmaids who had oil for their lamps were asked to share their oil with the bridesmaids who had none, they did not share. If Jesus is about sharing, wouldn’t it have been nice for those ladies who had oil to share it with the ladies who had none? How do we make this parable fit with Jesus who says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy?”

Here comes the first scattered thought. I think the spiritual journey that we are all on, whether we realize it or not, has an element where we have to take responsibility for our own words, our attitudes, our beliefs, and ultimately our actions. There is a part of our faith journey that no one else can give us directly. Our parents took us to church as children, but at some point we had to take responsibility for our own faith development. We have to say “yes” to our part. We can’t abdicate the Church’s call to grow in holiness by simply saying, “the pope is holy so I don’t need to be.” We cannot relinquish our personal call to charity nor our collective call to justice by saying, “someone else will look after the poor, the homeless, the polluted earth, the treatment of minorities, the prejudices that abound, etc.” As Christians, we need to take our personal and

collective responsibility seriously. The late Fr. Anthony DeMello said, “God cannot be bothered to do for you, what you can do for yourself.” Similarly, our R.C.I.A. team cannot be bothered doing for our candidates what our candidates can do for themselves. I, as your pastor, cannot be bothered doing for you what you can do for yourself on your spiritual journey. And you should not be bothered doing for me what I could be and should be doing for myself. We are here to help each other, not to do it for each other. Maybe that is why the wise bridesmaids did not share their lamp oil with the foolish ones. Had they shared their oil, the foolish bridesmaids never would have taken responsibility for what was theirs in the first place.

A second scattered thought. While we must take our Christian responsibility seriously, it is not ours to do alone. We need the example of other wisdom figures, mentors, wise bridesmaids, the example of the saints who came before us as we move closer to God. And of course, we need God’s Spirit. While the bridesmaids are moving toward the Groom (God) in the dark of the night, the Groom is also moving toward them. They don’t have to do the journey all on their own. As God says through the prophet Jeremiah, **“If you seek me you will find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me.”** It’s a win-win situation. While you are seeking God, God has already been long on the trail of seeking you. Just in the seeking you will find God.



My father tells a story about me from a time before I had any memory of it; I was probably two. He would play hide-and-seek with me and my three older brothers, who would have been three, four, and five. My father would hide me in a laundry basket and cover me with clothes and towels and tell me to be quiet. Then he would say to his other three boys, “Where’s Philip?” like as if he didn’t know. Before my

three brothers could begin the search I would yell, “I’m right here in the basket.” I didn’t get the concept of hide-and-seek, and so my brothers never had to put much energy into finding me. We had to stop this game when I was 17; I couldn’t

fit in the laundry basket anymore. The only person worse at hide-and-seek than me, is God. ***"If you seek me, you'll find. I'll let you find me."*** The wise bridesmaids are serious about the "seeking"; they are prepared. And God is serious about the "finding" making it so easy to be found.

A third scattered thought. In a recent homily I shared with you two questions that a fellow retreatant shared with me while on a Men's Rite of Passage retreat in California a few years ago. This Australian regularly asks himself, "Where are you going? And, who are you taking with you?" If we do not ask the first question (Where am I going?) and simply jump to the second question (Who am I taking with me?) we will probably end up going nowhere and never grow or mature in our faith. We will simply surround ourselves with "buddies" who are not necessarily going anywhere themselves in their lives. But when we first discern where we are going, then we will choose wisely companions (and not simply buddies) who will walk with us as we try to grow in our faith. Maybe the cherished oil in the bridesmaids' lamps is not oil at all. Perhaps the oil is really the wisdom figures, the saints like St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, our patron who teach us how to seek God and remind us that God, the true Bridegroom, has always been looking for us. Elizabeth, before she was St. Elizabeth said: "I find Him everywhere while doing the wash as well as while praying." Before she could get to the wash, God was already there. You cannot get to God; you are always met by God.

Fr. Phil