Homily for Sunday, November 8, 2026



Even though we're still a few weeks away from the Season of Advent, the gospel parable we just heard sounds very much like an Advent story, in so far as Advent is about preparing, and longing, and waiting. The bridesmaids, who represent all of us, regardless of whether you are male or female, fall into two categories—the wise and the foolish, the prepared and the unprepared. The bridegroom is Jesus. As the bridesmaids awaited the groom, in the parable, so we await the return of Jesus, not as a vulnerable baby but in glory and might and power. When that return will happen, nobody knows. Even Jesus admits that he doesn't know; only God knows.

The setting of the parable is a wedding feast. What happens at weddings? Union. The two become one. This is God's great desire, to be one with every human being. He wants to take you to Himself--into his bridal chamber--and have children with you. He wants your life to bear fruit. But you can't bear fruit until you unite with God. The branch (you and I), if cut off from the vine (Jesus), cannot bear fruit. The goal of the spiritual life is union with God so that we can bear fruit, here and now. Unfortunately, lots of people grew up thinking that the spiritual life was about avoiding sin, so that someday we can go to heaven. It's supposed to be a love affair, here and now, with God who is madly in love with us. Regrettably, for many, the spiritual journey is nothing more than fire insurance for the next world.

In the Mediterranean culture of Jesus' time, it was just assumed that marriages would be arranged by the families of both the bride and the groom. Marriages were seen not simply as the union of this man and this woman but more as the union of two families; it united the clan. The bridegroom, along with his relatives would got to the bride's house where the bride would be waiting with her bridesmaids. As the groom drew close, the bride along with her bridesmaids would leave her house to go meet him. Hand in hand, with the bridesmaids in tow, the bride and groom would walk to his house to be married, and the banquet would follow.

We are told in this parable that the groom was delayed in arriving at the bride's house (probably because he was too proud to ask for directions!) until midnight. It's important that Jesus tells the story that way, including the delay. Many first-century Christians, including most people who wrote the New Testament, expected the return of Jesus in glory to happen within their own lifetimes. Like the groom in the story, Jesus, in their minds was delayed. However, Jesus never promised them an exact day and time; only God the Father knows. But Jesus did, including in parables, tell us to be prepared.

As you heard, five bridesmaids were prepared for the groom's arrival, while the other five were not. The unprepared bridesmaids were not reprehended because they fell asleep while they waited for the groom; all 10 fell asleep. Falling asleep was not the problem. Not being prepared was the problem.

This story reminds of the days and weeks following the September 11th attack in N.Y.C. 25 years ago. For about three months after the attack, Americans were all on their knees turning to God. But soon afterward, when the fear and anxiety faded, many went about their own business with hardly a glance in God's direction. Their lamps, after three months, went out. They weren't prepared for the attack, neither were they prepared to continue to turn to God in any regular fashion.

I think part of the reason why the euphoria—this turning to God—didn't last, is because it's very hard to develop faith in the midst of a crisis. It's easy to cry ***"Lord, Lord"*** in the middle of a crisis, but it's hard to build faith on the spot. If the practice of turning to God daily in prayer wasn't there before 9/11, it meant there was little to turn to as an anchor, afterwards. Jesus says, ***"Walk while you have the light before darkness overtakes you"*** (Jn. 12:35-36). In other words, learn to turn to God while it is still light, so that when a crisis, when darkness, surrounds you, you will have something to hold onto, something to guide you. You won't panic but, instead, you'll live with hope. The foolish bridesmaids panic without light in their lamps. And they panic even more when they are left outside the wedding banquet, in the dark.

Perhaps this occurred to you as you listened to this parable. If Jesus is about sharing, wouldn't it have been nice for the five bridesmaids who had oil to share it with the five who didn't? How do you make this parable fit with Jesus' words when he said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Mt. 5:7). The reason the bridesmaids who have oil can't give it to those who have none is that the oil symbolizes something that is not transferable. This is a story of foolish people and wise people. Wisdom is not only lacking in five of the bridesmaid, but it's also

non-transferable. If I have any wisdom, it comes from God, and it comes from my own life experiences. Wisdom is not a ham sandwich that I can cut in half and share with you. The wisdom God gives me, is uniquely for me, just as the wisdom God imparts to you is uniquely your own. Similarly, the wisdom I've gained through the experiences of my life are unique to me just as your life experiences are unique to you.

While wisdom is not transferable, it is passed on more through osmosis. By just hanging around wise people, it will rub off on you. The door, for wisdom to pass through, needs only be open a crack, and in it comes.

Rembrandt, the great painter, could not give you his ability to paint. But, if you hung around him long enough, through osmosis, you would become a better painter. You still have to do your own homework, in the spiritual life. You can't ride on the coattails of anyone else. You can't say, "The pope is holy, so I don't need to be holy."

We're all given adequate oil for our lamps. Who has help you, alive or passed on, on your faith journey? Who has told you about a bridegroom who is madly in love with you and who longs each day to walk alongside you?

When each of us were baptized, probably too young to remember, the priest presented our parents and godparents with a candle lit from the paschal candle. The priest would have said these words: ***"Receive the light of Christ. Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) keep the flame of faith alive in his (her) heart. When the Lord comes, may he (she) go out—like the wise bridesmaids—to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom."***

Fr. Phil