

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Wisdom is radiant and unfading,
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,
and is found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.
One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.
To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,
because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,
and meets them in every thought.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters,
about those who have died,
so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.
For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,
even so, through Jesus,
God will bring with him those who have died.
For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord,
that we who are alive,
who are left until the coming of the Lord,
will by no means precede those who have died.
For the Lord himself, with a cry of command,
with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet,
will descend from heaven,
and the dead in Christ will rise first.
Then we who are alive, who are left,
will be caught up in the clouds
together with them to meet the Lord in the air;
and so we will be with the Lord forever.
Therefore encourage one another with these words.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 32

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Jesus spoke this parable to the disciples:
“The kingdom of heaven will be like this.
Ten bridesmaids took their lamps
and went to meet the bridegroom.
Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;
but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.
As the bridegroom was delayed,
all of them became drowsy and slept.
But at midnight there was a shout,
‘Look! Here is the bridegroom!
Come out to meet him.’
Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.
The foolish said to the wise,
‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’
But the wise replied,
‘No! There will not be enough for you and for us;
you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’
And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came,
and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet;
and the door was shut.
Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying,
‘Lord, lord, open to us.’
But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’
Keep awake therefore,
for you know neither the day nor the hour.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Wisdom 6:12-16

This excerpt comes from the conclusion of the first part of the Book of Wisdom. The theme of that part is that wisdom is the gateway to immortality. Hence the overall context—though it is hardly visible from our extract—is eschatological.

The pericope itself is a concluding exhortation to seek wisdom, an assertion of its accessibility (cf. Prov 8). Bearing in mind its eschatological context, we can relate this reading to the other readings.

Those who seek and find wisdom will have acquired something that will survive the Last Judgment, which Paul describes in the Second Reading, while the Gospel speaks of the “wise” virgins—those who sought after wisdom. Also, compare the emphasis on vigilance in verse 15 of this reading with Matt 25:13, the last sentence of our Gospel reading.

Responsorial Psalm: 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

The first part of this psalm (through verse 8) falls into the category of an individual lament. The soul expresses its thirst for communion with God in the temple, and its delight when communion is established.

We may link this with the search for the divine wisdom (First Reading) and with the virgins’ longing to meet the bridegroom (Gospel).

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 or 4:13-14

The short form is apparently permitted not merely on the grounds of brevity but because it omits the highly bizarre eschatological imagery of the long form. Such imagery is certainly difficult for the modern Christian and requires demythologizing if its message is to be rightly heard.

Paul’s converts had received from him the impression that the Second Coming was imminent (see 1 Thess 1:10). Meanwhile, some of them died—before the parousia.

First Paul urges the Thessalonians not to grieve and then states his grounds for not grieving: since Jesus died and rose again, the believers who die will likewise rise again. Then he seeks to prove this from a “word of the Lord.”

Scholars are divided as to whether this means a saying of the earthly Jesus (cf. perhaps Mark 9:1) or a saying received from the risen Christ through a Christian prophet, like the sayings in the Book of Revelation.

How are we to demythologize, that is, not eliminate but interpret, the imagery for faith? The clue lies in Paul’s final statement: “so we will be with the Lord forever.”

The ultimate hope of the believer is christological, and it is corporate.

It is christological because it is not merely a hope of individual survival after death but of being with the risen Christ in his transformed resurrection existence. It is not attained through any intrinsic quality of one's own, such as an immortal soul, but solely because Jesus entered into resurrection existence before us and will enable us to enter it, too.

It is corporate, for again the Christian hope is not for individual salvation but for the restoration in Christ of humanity, indeed of the whole cosmos.

Paul was time-conditioned in his apocalyptic imagery and mistaken in his belief that the parousia was imminent, but he asserts an abiding truth. And because of that truth, the Christian is enabled to transcend the grief of bereavement, unlike the "others who have no hope."

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the ten virgins (RSV: "maidens"; NRSV: "bridesmaids") would appear to have a long history behind it. Like many other parables, it may be interpreted at three different levels of tradition—Jesus, the oral tradition of the early post-Easter church, and the evangelist's redaction.

It is often argued that this parable is an allegory and therefore could not have come from Jesus. But it is not a pure allegory even in Matthew. Any allegory concocted by the early Church would surely have made the bride central to the story, for in the early church's ecclesiology the church was the bride of Christ. But the bride is never mentioned.

If the parable comes from Jesus, it must be a story taken from real life. True, it contains several puzzling details: Whose house was the groom entering—the bride's or his own—and in whose house did the marriage feast take place? What made the groom arrive so late? Would a wedding feast have taken place after midnight? Were the virgins bridesmaids, and if so, why did they have to escort the groom?

The fact is, we know too little about marriage customs of that time to answer all these questions and must assume that the whole story is true to life, though possibly with one element of surprise on which the whole meaning of the story turns, namely, the astonishingly late arrival of the groom.

In order to understand what the story could have meant on the lips of Jesus, we must forget all the allegorical equations (e.g., the groom = the Son of Man; his return = the parousia; the virgins = good and bad Christians or believers and unbelievers; the wedding feast = the messianic banquet) and let the parable make its own point as a story from life.

Those who hear Jesus' message of the dawning kingdom and respond with repentance and faith will be accepted when it finally comes, while those who reject his message will find out their mistake too late.

The early church (see Luke 13:25) began to give allegorical interpretations to the individual elements in the story in order to adapt the parable to its own situation. The Jewish community by and large had rejected the church's preaching of Jesus as Messiah, while others had accepted it.

Finally, Matthew places the parable in the framework of his Gospel. The introductory word "Then" in verse 1 (omitted in the incipit of the Lectionary) links the parable to the foregoing chapter, the so-called synoptic apocalypse, which culminates in the coming of the Son of Man for the Last Judgment. At the end (Mt 25:13) Matthew adds a floating saying in the Jesus tradition: "Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Viewed in the overall context of Matthew's Gospel, the parable now acquires a fresh meaning. The division between the wise and the foolish virgins becomes the division between those in Matthew's church who keep the commandments of Christ, the new law-giver of the church, and those who hear his words but fail to do what he commands. Note also that Matthew follows the parable of the ten virgins with the parables of the talents and of the sheep and goats. All three parables make pretty much the same point.

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