

# Last Sunday of the Church Year

## Matthew 25:1-13

### November 19-20, 2011

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Ten virgins pure watching in the dark; ten virgins pure waiting in the flickering light; ten virgins pure surrounded by temptations, dangers in the night. Outwardly they were all clean and undefiled. Nonetheless, these handmaidens of the Lord were overcome. Their flesh was weak. They were seduced by sleep, enticed to slumber. Their eyes grew heavy and they gave up, gave in. They quit fighting. They let the night have its way with them. The oil's light burned in vain while they satisfied their carnal wants.

And then the midnight cry! It caught them unaware, found them tucked in bed with lovers not their husbands, their virginity and their duties all forgotten. The oil was gone, wasted, frivolously spent in vain pursuits, for pleasure's sake. For when they gave up hope of the bridegroom's appearing they were too lazy to extinguish their lamps. *What did it matter?* They thought that He would not return. And then the cry and then the panic and then the begging: **give us some of yours**. But there was none to spare. No one can believe for another. So out went the five fools into the night seeking to buy what can only be given. They returned empty-handed, too late. The door was shut. Therefore, watch! Beware! Repent!

It is hard to stay awake these sleepy days, James and John and Peter know. We abide at the end of time. Temptation grows stronger deeper in the night. It seems so futile to keep watch. We've waited already all our lives and still He has not come. There are pleasures beckoning to us all around. And no one seems to care if we slip in a few winks or go off for a while, if we go and do those things that young men and middle-aged men and old men

think to be their right and their necessary rites of passage. *If we behave like the ancient men of Rome or of Carthage or the modern men of New York or San Francisco or Amsterdam, who can blame us? We are but men. Must we really be so vigilant and suffer so all through this night of days and months and years? Can't we just have our fun and then repent at the end?*

No. We cannot. That way leads to death. Now is the hour of salvation. Even if Our Lord should continue to delay, no man knows when his last hour will come. Repent before it is too late. Repent and watch.

And for the sake of hope and confidence notice this: all ten virgins fell asleep. All ten. All ten were outwardly pure, yet all ten failed in their vigil. *What made five wise and five foolish?* The wise still had oil. By the grace of God, despite their weakness and self-pity, despite their arrogance and indulgence, even while in the midst of their unfaithfulness and defilement, they never completely gave up hope. They never stopped believing that He would come. They trimmed their lamps, and whatever little oil was left, was enough. It was multiplied like the widow's oil in Zarephath or the Maccabean warriors' oil in the cave. Their oil was given by God. For if He desires to be greeted and ushered into the chamber by virgins pure, He must create them. By grace, by what God supplied, the five wise virgins were spared the coming wrath and saved.

And so there is hope even for us. You have not defiled yourself so gravely that you cannot be cleansed. Your God has not forgotten you. He brought you here this day for a purpose: to forgive you anew, to restore your chastity and purity, to recreate you immaculate, strong in faith, undefiled, righteous and holy, and mostly wise. The world scoffs at this true wisdom but it comes from God: He is coming back.

He does all this for and to you through His Word. By the Word He creates and restores. He called you by Name through His Name in Holy Baptism. You were born in those waters from above and made alive. He speaks these saving, cleansing words in the

Scriptures, in the absolution, in the preaching, in His Church. He feeds these Words made flesh to you in the Holy Supper. This that He would be met on the last day with faith and praise and rejoicing and His work outside the city gate would not be in vain. For He has not fallen asleep. He does not forget His promise. He still and always loves you and makes you again virgin pure. It is ever a new day in Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Concerning then the time and the seasons, you have no need that St. Paul should tell you. He doesn't know them anyway, nor does even the Son of Man Himself. All you need to know, the best and surest wisdom in all of creation, is that the day is surely coming. It will come suddenly, unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. God in His great love will steal you away from the darkness, death, and chaos of this fallen world. He will pull you from your traitorous bed and trim your lamp. You will again be pure and undefiled. You are not of the darkness or of the night no matter how sleepy and lazy you might feel. You are of the day. You are of Jesus Christ.

God did not appoint you for wrath. He appointed His Son for that in your stead. For one eternal afternoon He hung in Hell for you, was forsaken of the Father, was defiled by death, and the demons danced on His grave. But they were soundly dispersed and disappointed when the tomb was opened by the angel and the guards struck dumb. The night forever ended when the Dayspring from on high rose and gave Light to men. In this way, by His death and resurrection, He appointed you to Himself. He died for you that you would live with Him.

Watch and wait. Do not be afraid. Surely the day is drawing near. Thank God for it.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.