

32nd Sunday of Ordinary Time A “Don’t run out of oil”

Fr. Frank Schuster

As the days get shorter and shorter and nighttime gets longer and longer, and the rain gets colder and wetter, the Church readings also become darker and more serious. As the Church year comes to a close, the Scriptures will challenge us to focus on the end of the world and the final judgment. In the next few weeks we will hear about disciples who are vigilant and prepared for their hour of death and we will hear about disciples who are not prepared. The invitation to all of us is to keep watch for we will not know the day or the hour when our Lord is going to call our name.

And so, just for a moment, I invite us to look around at all the people in the Church. Take a good look around. Let the faces sink in now. OK. Here we go. I am going to break it to you as gently as I know how. Every one of us, in the next let's say 100 years, will have died. There it is! I know this is uncomfortable to think about, but we have got to do this! Indeed, most of us probably will have died a lot sooner than 100 years from now. Now, I ask you to focus on what you are feeling as this reality is sinking in deeper and deeper. Some of us may be thinking, "How morbid, can't Fr. Frank just talk about love or something?" Others may feel a little unnerved at how little they have ever thought about their mortality or the mortality of their loved ones. Others may be feeling at peace because they have already done this spiritual work. But this is an important exercise, my friends, to remember that we are mortal. Why?

Because one day the Lord is going to take us away from this life, like a thief in the night! This could be tonight, tomorrow night, or decades from now, but it will happen. It is inevitable. Most likely, none of us will be here a century from now. And so, the questions the Gospel will be asking us these next few weeks: Are we prepared? Have we lived our lives with the appropriate priorities in place or have we gone through life drowsy or asleep, in denial of the fact that our time is limited? And you know what? This is not supposed to be a morbid message, not for people of faith. Rather it is a message aimed at helping us to get our priorities straight, to help us love God and love others better. And so, my friends, the Gospel is about love after all!

In the Gospel today, ten virgins grabbed their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Jesus is telling a story of something that commonly occurred in his time. The ten virgins are what we would call today "the bridesmaids", the "bride" in this story can be interpreted as being humanity. The bridegroom, of course, is Jesus whose divinity marries humanity in the incarnation. Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity, unites his full divinity with our full humanity in a marvelous exchange. Jesus receives as our dowry our sin and death while we receive from Jesus eternal life. Therefore, the "bridesmaids", you and I, are invited to keep our lamps lit and full of oil so that when the Lord comes to us, we can enter this marriage banquet that unites humanity and divinity for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of the whole world.

We are invited by the Lord to keep our lamps full of oil because we do not know the day or the hour when the bridegroom will be coming for us. How do we keep the lamps full of oil? I think we all know how to keep our lamps full of oil. We keep our lamps full with oil by keeping the commandments, loving God and loving neighbor, saying our daily prayers, going to Church on Sunday, participating in the sacraments, receiving the sacrament of reconciliation when our oil is running low, being good stewards of the time God has given us, being good stewards of the talents God has given us to help make our family, Church and world a better place, and being good stewards of the financial resources we have, insuring that our family is taken care of, our present needs and future needs are taken care of, that our community is taken care of, locally and globally, and our Church is taken care of, both locally and globally. When we do this, the lamp of our lives has substance to it, and our light shines in the darkness of this world. Our light shines when there is oil in our lamps, leading people to Christ.

Christians, the invitation this Sunday is to keep your lamps full with oil. Live your life like someone prepared to meet God. Live your life spiritually awake, not drowsy or asleep. Live your life recognizing that, one day, you will die. And this is not a morbid recognition, but an honest one that will help us live better. Indeed, Carl Jung suggested that a lot of the dysfunctions, addictions, and financial troubles people get into are symptomatic of souls who haven't quite come to terms with their own mortality. They live their lives medicating themselves; trying to forget that, one day, they will die.

Once we are honest with ourselves about our mortality and allow Christ into our lives as our savior, good things begin to happen. We will begin to take better care of our environment. We will begin to take better care of our personal health, our financial health, the welfare of our family, our parish family, our city of Woodinville, our state, country and world, if we remember that all is a gift from God. And God expects us to be good stewards of the time, talent and treasure he has provided us. One day, we will be held to an accounting.

It is like a Christmas gift we receive from family members. In my family, when my sister or mother gives me a sweater, I had better wear it or I am in deep trouble. Does that sound familiar in your family? My friends, Jesus reminds us this week that God has given us the gift of our very life. God has given us the gift of our very existence! A slightly better gift than a sweater! The Lord has even tasted our death on the cross that we might have his eternal life. At the end of time, God will want to know if we were good stewards of such an awesome gift as existence. We do not know the day or the hour, and so therefore, my friends, the invitation is to not wait until tomorrow, be prepared now, plan ahead, be a good steward, keep your lamps lit, and for heaven's sake, don't run out of oil!