Our Sunday Readings

WISDOM 6:12-16
PSALM 63:2-8
I THESSALONIANS 4:13-18
(or 4:13-14)
MATTHEW 25:1-13

Keeping Vigil

WISDOM 6:12-16

Reading closely

1. Why do you think the author describes Wisdom as beautiful?
2. What sort of people seek Wisdom?
3. How eagerly do people seek Wisdom?
4. How eagerly does Wisdom seek people?
5. How do people who seek Wisdom know when they've found her?
6. What all might people who are not seeking Wisdom be doing instead?

Living the word

7. How would you explain what *wisdom* is?
8. When have you sought wisdom? Did you find it?
9. Have you ever rejected wisdom when it was offered to you?
10. Do you seek friendships with people you consider wise? Why/Why not?

THE FIRST READING

A wise tradition

The Book of Wisdom was written about a century before the birth of Jesus. Its author wrote primarily for Jews who were turning away from their religious heritage and embracing Greek culture and philosophy. The author tried to convince his fellow Jews that their ancestral faith was as good if not better than the Gentile ideas they were learning about.

Lady Wisdom

In the Old Testament God's wisdom is often personified as a woman. Lady Wisdom walks through the streets, calling out for people to learn from her. She hosts grand banquets at which people feast on her words (Proverbs 9).

Seeking

Lady Wisdom doesn't hide herself, but people must persist in seeking her and learning from her. In other words, God makes every effort to draw close to people and guide them. Those who take time to pray and reflect on how they can more truly follow God will find what they seek.

Unfading

Wisdom is beautiful and permanent. Those who seek her find happiness in this life and the next. Those who reject her and seek their own path will find only death in the end (Wisdom 1:16f).

MATTHEW 25:1-13

Reading closely

1. What all might the ten women be thinking and feeling?
2. Why do you think five of the women thought to bring extra oil?
3. How do you think the women initially react to the long wait?
4. Is it wrong for the women to sleep?
5. Would you stay and wait?
6. How do you imagine the women reacting to the news that the groom is coming?
7. Would you share your oil?
8. How would you feel if you had to go buy oil?
9. How would you feel if you were among those who went into the feast with the groom?
10. If you were locked out, how would you feel?
11. Why do you think the groom doesn't recognize the other five women?
12. What does this parable teach you about God's kingdom?

Living the word

13. What makes a person foolish?
14. What makes a person wise?
15. In what ways are you like the wise women?
16. In what ways are you like the foolish ones?
17. How are you trying to *stay awake*?

THE GOSPEL READING

Jewish weddings

During Jewish weddings of this era the groom would bring his bride from her house into his or, if he didn't yet have a house, into his father's house. The families then celebrated the occasion with a feast. In this story the ten virgins/maidens are waiting for the groom to arrive home with his bride. They will then go out to meet him and accompany him and his new wife back to his home.

The women have brought oil lamps. Once the wick burns through the oil, they will have to add more or the lamp will go out. If the wise women share the oil they had the foresight to bring, there might not be enough oil and all the lamps could go out, turning a happy, festive occasion into a much darker and embarrassing one.

Allegorical elements

Parts of the parable are allegorical: Jesus is the groom, the groom's arrival is the Last Judgment, and the wedding feast is God's kingdom. Other parts aren't allegorical: the women and the oil don't represent anyone or anything in particular.

Repeated warnings

The parable echoes Jesus' warning that many will cry, "Lord, Lord," but will not enter God's kingdom (7:21-23). It also recalls the story of the foolish person who built a house on sand and the wise person who built on rock (7:24-27).

Stay awake

All of the women doze off, but only some of them brought extra oil. *Stay awake* (v.13) is thus a metaphor for being prepared. Even when the groom is delayed for a long time, five of the women still don't prepare for his eventual arrival. The parable leaves open the question of why these five women don't plan ahead.

The story focuses on the unexpected arrival of God's kingdom. Everyone must be ready at all times – whether asleep or awake – for Christ to return. How to get and stay ready is a question we must each ask ourselves.

PRAYER

by St. Anselm of Canterbury

O Lord,
you are my Lord and my God,
yet I have never seen you.
You have created and redeemed me and
have conferred on me all my goods,
yet I know you not.
I was created in order that I might know you,
but I have not yet attained the goal of my creation.

I confess, O Lord, and give you thanks that you
have created me in your image,
so that I might be mindful of you
and contemplate you and love you.

I seek not to understand in order that I may
believe; rather, I believe in order that I may
understand. Help me to know you. Amen.