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The last part of today's Gospel might strike us as quite grim and threatening. The door is closed, you're too late, you don't get in. The wedding feast, of course, is the reign of God. These parables that Jesus had been telling us, as Matthew says, "Throw light on the reign of God." This Gospel lesson and a couple others like it can be very frightening. We dread the idea that God would be saying, "You're too late. You're never going to make it into God's fullness of life."

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 6:12-16

Psalms 63

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

[Full text of the readings](#)

But if we listen deeply to the Scriptures, we find that it's not as grim as it might seem. First of all, I remind us of a passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah (it's in Chapter 30) where the chosen people have gone against God's word that has been given to them by the prophet. They wanted to go to war and Isaiah said, "No, that's not the way of God." But they did it anyway and they suffered a terrible defeat. Their city was destroyed and the temple was destroyed.

Then Isaiah has a beautiful line, which I think all of us should always keep in mind. In spite of their sinfulness, Isaiah says, "God is waiting to be gracious to us." No matter what, God is always waiting to be gracious to us. Isn't that what happened on the cross when Jesus was dying? Look at that sinner dying next to him. Obviously, he had lived a very evil life, but he says to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." What does Jesus say, "This day you will be with me in paradise." God is waiting to be gracious to us.

What does it take on our part? It takes some effort to listen to develop a spirit of readiness. Our first lesson today, which is taken from the Book of Wisdom, is a personification, really, of the wisdom of God, God coming to us in the form of a human person, a woman. But hear her last words in today's lesson: "Wisdom goes in

search of those who are worthy of her, graciously meets them on the way and is present in their every thought." Wisdom, which is the personification, in this case of God, is searching for us, looking for us so that we can learn from her.

That actually is also told to us in the beginning of the Gospel of John where in this passage, the very opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God." Look further on, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father, fullness of truth and loving goodness." So God sends Jesus into the world to be the word of God for us if we're ready to listen. What do we have to listen for or watch out for? It's to listen for the wisdom of God coming to us, to listen for the word of God coming to us in Jesus who became flesh, became one of us to teach us, to show us what is wisdom, and how to come into the reign of God.

That's what we have to be alert for — when Jesus comes into our life, the wisdom of God. Jesus comes into our life in that way every week through these sacred Scriptures if we listen and try to respond to what he tells us, try to change our lives so that we live according to the way of God. In the coming Sunday we'll hear that last part of this part of this Chapter 25 of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus says, "When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was homeless you took me in."

We know that passage so well. That's where we see Jesus if we're alert, ready for his coming into our lives. But we have to be ready to watch out for him in the hungry, the poor, the naked, those who are in prison, and those who are homeless. There are so many opportunities for that to happen, both in a very practical, real, concrete way by making sure, as you're doing in this parish family, that people have what they need for Thanksgiving, Christmas — the whole season, and by reaching out to the poor, responding to those on the street when we meet them, homeless, poor people. But it has to go beyond that.

Two things happened this week that I think are quite extraordinary, showing us that we not only have to look for Jesus and find Jesus in those who are hungry and naked, thirsty and ill, homeless and in prison, and so on, but we also have to try to change things in our society so that there won't be so many people homeless, helpless, and suffering. The one thing was this week at the bishop's meeting in Baltimore. They developed a statement critiquing the budget that Congress is now working on. They

analyzed it, as so many people have, that in fact, it's going to be bounty for the rich while taking money away from the poor.

Can we let that happen? We ought to be informing ourselves about this and be in touch with our congresspeople and senators. We need a budget that reaches out to the poor, not to the one percent, which is what will happen with the current format. It's quite unusual for the bishops to be so clear and blunt in their judgment, but on this one they are very plain. Even more, it seems to me, in a world where we're experiencing so much violence, Jesus comes to us in the words of Pope Francis because this week he has denounced what we call a strategy of deterrents with our nuclear weapons.

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We have them ready to use at short notice, immediately to do what President [Donald] Trump says to make "fire and fury like the world has never seen." Deterrents mean we won't use them first, although it's getting closer and closer to even that kind of a threat that we would use them first. But to use them in any case where you kill tens of millions of people, there's no discrimination between those who are waging war and those who are not. Everyone dies. In fact, if it happens, our planet will be destroyed.

Pope Francis has said that policy and deterrents cannot be followed. It goes against the way of Jesus, obviously, to bring about that kind of death and destruction. We've gone along with this for many years now, since the nuclear arms race started. We've enhanced our weaponry. We have tens of billions of dollars set aside in our budget to make more weapons and to make them more efficient, make them more destructive. What would that do to the people of this planet, ordinary people like you and me? It would certainly not be the way of Jesus. Pope Francis, for the first time, has denounced it as contrary to the way of Jesus.

There, too, we have a responsibility as followers of Jesus, as citizens of this country to try to do what we can to make sure that never happens. It will require us to pray, to reflect, to be alert, to be ready. That's what the Gospel says: "Be ready, for you know not the day or the hour when Jesus will come," in a special way into your life. Be ready when you meet Jesus in the poor and the afflicted. Be ready to welcome Jesus among those who are threatened by our weapons, those who are threatened

by our unjust financial budget. If we are alert and ready and willing to respond to the word of Jesus, then we never need fear because God is always waiting to be gracious to us.

[Homily given Nov. 12 at St. Philomena Church in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]