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“Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt 25:13).

Wis 6:12-16; Ps 63; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Matt 25:1-13

The phrase “intimations of mortality” captures the implicit awareness we all carry about death. It is indeed intimate, as close as our next breath and heartbeat. Even children sense it, and adults face it as age and infirmity gain on them.

Shakespeare’s Hamlet ponders “the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns.” Yet, the core of Christian faith is that one human being in fact did return, Jesus Christ, and in his victory over death is our hope.

The end of the liturgical year becomes the church’s long, collective prayer about death, our own and the fate of all our beloved dead. St. Paul, the most eloquent witness for resurrection, was also the most realistic about his own death. “Now is the time of my dissolution,” he wrote as his death approached (2 Tim 4:6). For him, it was his final offering before taking his place with the risen Christ. He encouraged his nascent churches to trust God even as the first Christians were dying before Jesus returned in glory.

To put today’s Gospel in context, it is the first of three long parables in Matthew 25 that focus on how to live in the interim until the *Parousia* so as to share in the promise of life Jesus proclaimed. We first hear a story about 10 bridesmaids, five wise and five foolish, who were awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. The wise had extra lamp oil for the prolonged vigil, and the foolish did not. Then we hear of three servants who were entrusted with funds to invest while their master was away. Two prospered and one did not. The final parable describes judgment day when those

who showed their love for Jesus by serving the least of his brothers and sisters are welcomed into heaven, while those who neglected him are shocked to realize their failure.

These parables are all about long-haul faith, staying alert to Jesus' presence now and prepared for his return at the end of time. "Stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour." While we wait, the Holy Spirit has already given gifts to everyone. Use those gifts generously and see them grow. The failure to invest your gifts is to miss the joy of life. Finally, do not be surprised when you encounter Jesus disguised among the poor, waiting for you to imitate his example of service and compassion. If you stay awake, set your minds and hearts to building the kingdom of love and justice, you don't need to worry about what is going to happen. Self-emptying love in this world will be your glory in the world to come.

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