Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“At midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him” (Matt 25:5).

1 Cor 1:17-25; *Matt 25:1-13*

The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids describes the expectation of the early church for the return of Jesus, which many believed was imminent. Readiness meant keeping the light of faith strong. But, as the years passed, faith in the second coming waned, and the Gospel writers shifted their focus from an immediate return to the understanding that the risen Jesus was already present with the church through the Holy Spirit, working within history.

The parable reflects the reality that the bridegroom was “long delayed,” and that some of the watchers were falling asleep and running out of oil, while others were steadfast and maintaining their vigil and their lights. The bridegroom comes in the dead of night, and only those with the deepest reserves of faith are prepared to enter the wedding. Others lack the faith to see what is happening, and they beg the faithful ones to give them some of their light. But it is impossible to give someone this relationship and intimate knowledge all at once, so the “foolish” bridesmaids miss their rendezvous with the bridegroom.

This interpretation of the parable is only one way to understand its symbolism, but it conveys to us even now the steadfast urgency of the life of faith. Its essence is a lifelong relationship of trust in God’s promises and a daily practice of seeking Christ in all things. This is not something we can purchase or borrow from someone else, but a personal commitment that develops over time.

Yet the parable’s warning should also be balanced by other parables Jesus told of God’s patience and mercy. The Jesus who sought out sinners like lost sheep and ate with outcasts and held open the door for latecomers like the thief on the cross must be considered alongside the early church’s struggle to define who was worthy and who was not. We see this tension between unconditional mercy and emphasis on rules in today’s contrast between Pope Francis and a number of American bishops.

The journey of faith is one of continual discernment and openness to God’s grace. We must do our part to stay on course, but the full story leaves room for surprises. This includes the image of Jesus opening the doors even for the foolish, drowsy bridesmaids at the end of the story, so that the wedding feast will be complete. Because even sinners, like us, both wise and foolish, are welcome. This is truly the joy of the Gospel.

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