



Sunday Mass Preparation Guide

Including

The Readings

**First Reading
Responsorial Psalm
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Gospel**

Study Guide

**Study Guide including Background on Readings
And Thought Questions**

In-Depth Reflection

**A Thought-Provoking Written Analysis on
One of the Readings**

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB » Bible » Daily Readings

NOVEMBER 12, 2017

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 154

Reading 1

WIS 6:12-16

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom,
and she is readily perceived by those who love her,
and found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire;
Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed,
for he shall find her sitting by his gate.
For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence,
and whoever for her sake keeps vigil
shall quickly be free from care;
because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her,
and graciously appears to them in the ways,
and meets them with all solicitude.

Responsorial Psalm

PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

R. (2b) My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary
to see your power and your glory,
For your kindness is a greater good than life;
my lips shall glorify you.
R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
Thus will I bless you while I live;
lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name.
As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied,
and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.
R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
I will remember you upon my couch,

and through the night-watches I will meditate on you:
 You are my help,
 and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.

R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

Reading 2

1 THES 4:13-18

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
 about those who have fallen asleep,
 so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.
 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose,
 so too will God, through Jesus,
 bring with him those who have fallen asleep.
 Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord,
 that we who are alive,
 who are left until the coming of the Lord,
 will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep.
 For the Lord himself, with a word of command,
 with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God,
 will come down from heaven,
 and the dead in Christ will rise first.
 Then we who are alive, who are left,
 will be caught up together with them in the clouds
 to meet the Lord in the air.
 Thus we shall always be with the Lord.
 Therefore, console one another with these words.

Or

1 THES 4:13-14

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
 about those who have fallen asleep,
 so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.
 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose,
 so too will God, through Jesus,
 bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Alleluia

MT 24:42A, 44

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
 Stay awake and be ready!
 For you do not know on what day your Lord will come.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

MT 25:1-13

Jesus told his disciples this parable:
 "The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins
 who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

Five of them were foolish and five were wise.
 The foolish ones, when taking their lamps,
 brought no oil with them,
 but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps.
 Since the bridegroom was long delayed,
 they all became drowsy and fell asleep.
 At midnight, there was a cry,
 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'
 Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps.
 The foolish ones said to the wise,
 'Give us some of your oil,
 for our lamps are going out.'
 But the wise ones replied,
 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you.
 Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.'
 While they went off to buy it,
 the bridegroom came
 and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him.
 Then the door was locked.
 Afterwards the other virgins came and said,
 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!'
 But he said in reply,
 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.'
 Therefore, stay awake,
 for you know neither the day nor the hour."

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THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 12, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *Lord God, in today's Gospel, you call us to be always ready for your coming. Help us to develop a spirit of vigilance. Be with us as we share our lives and listen to your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: How did you experience God's presence and action in your life?

Facilitator reads focus statement: Wise people make God the center of their lives and are prepared for God's unexpected coming. In the first reading, personified Wisdom comes to those who are morally attuned and prepared to receive her. The Gospel speaks about the importance of readiness for God's visitation. In the second reading, Paul speaks about the fate of those who die before the Lord's return.

If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

FIRST READING: Wisdom 6:12-16

For the ancient Israelites, "wisdom" means much more than "intelligence" and "knowledge." It is all one needs to live a happy and fruitful life. In this reading, Wisdom is personified as a woman who is ready to help all who seek her. The wise person seeks the company of Lady Wisdom who is only too willing to "make herself known" to all. The relationship between Wisdom and the one who seeks her is reciprocal. The seeker seeks out Lady Wisdom but she also hastens to make herself known in anticipation of human desires.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 63

This psalm is a beautiful song of one seeking a relationship with Divine Wisdom. Having this relationship is "greater than life" which reminds us that life without God and his love is no life at all.

SECOND READING: 1Thessalonians 4:13-18

Expectations of the return of Christ, his Second Coming, are ripe in this Christian community. Many believe that Jesus will return in their lifetime. Disappointment sets in when it does not happen. Anxiety sets in when loved ones start to die. What will become of them? Paul seeks to address these concerns in these verses.

First, he tells the Thessalonians that they should not act as if they had no hope. Belief in the Resurrection implies that if we die with Christ, we shall rise with him. Mourners should temper their grief with hope.

Having assured his readers that believers—living and dead—will live forever with Christ, Paul tries to describe *how* the Second Coming will happen. Fundamentalist Christians interpret these verses literally and believe that Paul is giving us an *exact* account of *how* Christ will return. Their interpretation is known as the "rapture," which means "being caught up." Most, if not all mainline churches see Paul's words as largely *symbolic*. He draws on the imagery of the prophet Daniel to express an indescribable theophonic (divine) experience. As Catholics, we would say that we do not know the *when, how or where* of Christ's Second Coming. We just believe that Christ *will* return and all the faithful who have ever lived and believed will enjoy his presence for all eternity.

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

Scholars tell us that many of Jesus' parables have two or more levels of meaning to them. The first level is the *intended* meaning for the *original* audience. In the original audience, the *wise* ones are those who hear and embrace the message of Jesus. The *foolish* ones are those who close their hearts to his message. At the *second level*, the intended audience is Matthew's own community (living some 40+ years later). His fellow Jews, who choose not to receive Jesus (the bridegroom) or the church, are the *foolish and unprepared bridesmaids*. But others, mainly Gentiles, accept the message of Jesus as preached by the early Christians. These are regarded as wise.

At a *third level*, the parable is used by Matthew to teach a lesson about *vigilance* to *all* believers. Here

the wise ones are those believers who keep their lamps trimmed in preparing to meet Jesus by daily hearing and keeping of his Word. The 'foolish' ones are those who hear Jesus' message but do not act on it, just like the man who builds his house on sand and has nothing to fall back on in time of crisis. The Gospel ends with a warning for all readers. Since no one knows the day or hour of Jesus' return, all would be wise to sustain an attitude of continuous preparedness.

Some of us may criticize those who had oil for failing to share with those who had no oil. Scholars point out: the parable is *not* about compassionate giving to those without. It is a call to personal readiness for the Lord's return. "*Stay awake for you do not know the day nor the hour.*"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image in the readings spoke to you most? Why?
2. What is your definition or description of wisdom? How can we grow in wisdom?
3. How differently would you live your life if you knew that you had only six months to live?
4. What can help us to remain vigilant for the Lord's comings into our lives?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on this Sunday's readings. Suggestion: This week, be more vigilant and attentive to how God may be trying to get through to you in the events and encounters of your daily life. ©

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Save the Date!!

Saturday, March 10, 2018

Annual Day of Reflection

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!

CONNECTING TODAY'S GOSPEL WITH THE HURRICANE IN NEW ORLEANS

Reflection for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Jay Cormier who writes interesting reflections on the Sunday readings wrote the following two pieces on today's parable about the bridesmaids.

Take a bucket or pail. In the center of the pail, place a cereal bowl. Now fill the pail around the cereal bowl with water right up to the brim of the cereal bowl.

You have just constructed a model of the topography of the city of New Orleans.

New Orleans is a "bowl" that is surrounded by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Pontchartrain. Any sloshing of the water from the gulf and the lake will pour into the bowl and destroy the city.

Thirty years ago, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers designed a system of levees-walls around the brim of the New Orleans bowl. Corps engineers said that the city would be protected from a storm as powerful as a category 3 hurricane-any storm greater than category 3 was too rare to even contemplate.

But since the 1970's, Louisiana lawmakers have sought funding from the federal government to upgrade the levees-but the project was never made a priority. Ten years ago, engineering professors from Louisiana State developed a computer model demonstrating how a category 5 hurricane could kill tens of thousands of people in New Orleans. Last year the Army Corps of Engineers asked Congress for \$105 million for hurricane and flood programs in New Orleans; they received less than half that amount.

As we all know, last month the unthinkable happened. Hurricane Katrina, a category 4 hurricane, struck New Orleans and the Gulf coast. The fragile, aging levee system was overwhelmed by the power of Katrina. Water poured over and through the levees and devastated New Orleans.

There is now a plan to develop a new levee system that would protect New Orleans. It would cost \$14 billion-equal to the amount spent in Iraq in six weeks or the amount spent on the "big dig" tunnel project in Boston.

The broken levees of New Orleans have come to symbolize the failure of governments and institutions to prepare responsibly for such a disaster. What happened in New Orleans, like today's Gospel of the parable of the bridesmaids, confronts us with the preciousness and precariousness of life. Our faith and values, our sense of morals and ethics, are the levees on which we have built our lives. Too often economic expediency, fear and self-centeredness "breach" those levees causing hurt and devastation to ourselves and those around us. May the sad image of the broken levees in New Orleans compel us to understand anew how fragile our lives are and to realize that now is the time to seek the justice and compassion of God for those who have been overwhelmed by the many hurricanes that batter the human condition.

Cormier's second reflection is titled:

Penalty markers

In the comic strip The Wizard of Id, the diminutive king asks his chaplain for advice on a critical issue.

"How do you feel about the death penalty?" the king asks the priest.

"Not much we can do about it," the friar replies.

The king is perplexed by the priest's response.

"What do you mean there's nothing we can do about the death penalty?"

The priest explains, "Well, the fact is, we're born with it."

The last three Sundays of this liturgical year focus on the inevitability of death and the return of the Lord at the end of human history. The parable of the bridesmaids is taken from Jesus' fifth and final discourse in Matthew's Gospel-the great eschatological (end times) discourse. According to the custom in Gospel times, the groom would go to the bride's house on the day of the wedding to finalize the marriage contract with his father-in-law. Then the bridegroom would return to his own home with his bride. As the couple approached the house, they would be met by the bridesmaids, signaling the beginning of the wedding feast. Jesus uses the image of the wedding feast several times in the Gospel to symbolize God's invitation to his dwelling place the world to come. Rather than terrify or intimidate us or drive us to despair, the inevitable arrival of the bridegroom should make us appreciate the preciousness of the time we have been given by God in this life and inspire us to make the most of this time, filling our lamps with the oil of compassion, reconciliation and justice as we await Christ's coming. For we who claim the name of Christ in baptism, death marks not an ending but a beginning-the beginning of the great wedding feast of the Risen Christ.

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A little over ten years ago, I wrote the following two reflections on today's parable. The first one responds to a question often asked as people discuss the parable:

Weren't the wise bridesmaids selfish for failing to share their oil?

The answer is "no" because there are some things in life that cannot be very easily borrowed. In this case, oil refers to faith or inner spiritual resources. In a time of crisis, one can support another with one's own spiritual strength but one cannot just hand it over to another that easily. Spiritual resources are something given but also acquired by spending time relating to God over a period of time. Presiding at some funerals is made easy for me because of the rich faith life of the family. Some funerals are difficult because there seems to be little faith in members of the family. However much someone may wish to give them some spiritual resources (oil), it really cannot be done in a moment. It is something that must be cultivated over the years. So, when the gospel has the wise virgins say to the foolish ones: "Go and get yourselves some oil," they are not saying we can actually buy spiritual resources, but they are saying that we need to go and work at getting some.

Dealing With Irresponsible Behavior

My second reflection looks at the gospel in terms of responsible and irresponsible behavior. The five foolish bridesmaids could be seen as people who never prepare ahead of time and always expect others to bail them out at the last minute. Seen in this light, the parable addresses the problem of how to deal with habitually irresponsible people.

In this context, the five wise bridesmaids steer a middle course between two extremes. On one hand they do not berate the foolish ones for having no oil saying: "How many times have I told you to come prepared..." On the other hand, they will not cover over again and again the irresponsibility of the foolish ones. Instead, they simply allow them to bear the consequences of their own irresponsible behavior. Sometimes our charity to irresponsible people is not really charity but enablement. We are only feeding their addiction or dysfunction. Of course, it is sometimes a fine line and not easy to know what is true charity and what is enablement of a destructive lifestyle. St. Alphonsus Liguori use to encourage his people "to always err on the side of charity."

"The Last Things"

In Catholic theology the "Last Things" refers to death, judgment, heaven, hell and purgatory. In previous columns, I have written on "The Last Things", explaining for example Catholic belief around purgatory. If interested in reading about "The Last Things", go to *this column* on our web page: www.ascensioncatholic.net and click [here](#).

In the seventh century, St. John Climacus wrote the following interesting exhortation about death. *"Do not pass a day without thinking about your last one."* He called the thought of death the *"most essential of all works"* and a gift from God. *"The man who lives daily with the thought of death is to be admired."*

Reflecting on the words of St. John Climacus, Fr. Vella writes:

"You can see that this spiritual writer actually used the thought of death as a source of freedom and peace. He calls it a gift from God. When we realize that we are not going to live forever on this earth, then so many things in life lose their undue and inflated importance. When we are able to see life in perspective, we begin to relax about issues that would normally drive us to distraction. Since our life on earth is only for a time, then it doesn't make sense to live as if there were no end in sight.

Reflecting elsewhere on the event we call death, Fr. Vella writes:

Death is an ending, yes. But, let's admit it. We need endings. The end of a novel gives the reader a much-needed sense of completion. Same way with the conclusions to movies, to symphonies, or to telephone calls. Endings, like bookends on a shelf, give order and definition to our existence. Without endings, life would be one long run-on-sentence. But endings bring punctuation points to life. Endings provide periods. So we need not fear death. It is simply a punctuation mark. Death is the natural ending, the built-in conclusion, to the plot line of our lives. As natural, and as inevitable, as birth, death is one of the two bookends of life. Beyond those bookends is mystery to us. Just as the caterpillar cannot imagine a winged existence beyond the cocoon, we cannot imagine an existence beyond the grave. But the caterpillar trusts her Creator enough to enter that silken tomb. Without that trust, she dies a worm, and never soars. So must we trust God to bring us through the transforming mystery of death safely?

But in the meantime, life between the two bookends of birth and death has meaning and purpose precisely because it is limited. If there were no death, no sense of an end to our days, we would waste them even worse than we do now. This is the reason we become wiser as we get older. We begin to experience the limits of time, and thus we live more carefully,

more purposely, more lovingly, more faithfully. It is the person who has not faced their own mortality who lives recklessly and wastefully. Anything that seems limitless, whether it be time or money, loses its value. It is only as a thing become rare that it becomes important to us. Would diamonds be valuable if they were as plentiful as gravel on the road? Likewise, time is a rare and beautiful gift from God to us. To realize this is the beginning of a real life.

The Promise of a Safe Place

Is there any more welcoming sight after a long night of driving than a hotel with the VACANCY sign on? Just to know that there is a place for us, a place to lay our weary head, a safe place to rest, is good news for the traveler. We all need a place.

Or imagine the relief in the heart of a school-aged child boarding a crowded school bus when he or she scans the faces of strangers filling all the available seats, and then seeing the waving hand of a friend who calls that child by name and says, "Sit here. I have saved a place for you next to me." We all need a place.

Jesus knows this about us. He, who came to this world in the first place as a tiny infant, greeted only by NO VACANCY signs in Bethlehem, made sure that when we came to heaven we would be greeted differently. John 14:1-6, speaks of the place Jesus has prepared and reserved for all of those who will receive Christian faith. At the end of Life's journey, isn't it good to know God will have a place saved for us? This good news comforts us as we contemplate the reality of our death, and the deaths of our loved ones. Jesus does not give us enough exact details to satisfy our curiosity, but he tells us enough to answer our deepest needs. We will be with him and with all those who trust God. We will be safe. There is room enough for everyone. That is enough information to settle our troubled minds. So, take a deep breath, and say your prayers with confidence at the end of the day, *"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."* He will, dear one. God will.

Explaining death to an eight year old

An eight year old was attending his first funeral. This was the first time death had come close enough to alter his world. Grandmother had died. The eight year old asked his grandpa: "Grandpa, if God made us, and if God loves us,

why didn't God make us so that we would never die?" Grandpa answered: "Grandson, do you remember how much you used to love to play in the sandbox in your backyard when you were younger? Your entire world was not much larger than that sand box, the backyard, and your house. You never wanted to leave that sandbox. But one day your parents came to take you to kindergarten. You were afraid, for school meant leaving the only safe place and the only people you knew. But now that you have been to school, can you ever imagine staying forever in that small sandbox? Aren't you glad your parents loved you enough to make you leave the sandbox to live in the great big world? Well, that is the way God loves all His children too. This life as we know it is a wonderful sandbox, but according to Jesus, the best is yet to be.

Reflection Questions

- Do you tend to avoid all thought of death or do you periodically reflect on it as St. John Climacus urges us to do?
- If you died today or next week, are all your affairs in order? Do you have a Will? Do your loved ones know your wishes? Are you spiritually ready?