

November 12, 2017 Locking The Door Homily: Brothers and sisters, since the day of my ordination to the priesthood in 1984 I have heard many stories about the erratic, inexplicable behavior of some of my fellow priests. At times, their foolish actions leave me scratching my head. The following story is one example of extremely bad judgment.

A pastor of a local church was annoyed that many of his parishioners arrived late for Sunday mass. He considered their tardiness inexcusable and, even worse, disrespectful to the Lord. In his mind, they were ill prepared to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. So one Sunday morning he instructs his ushers to lock the doors of the church once mass begins. The ushers protest, but to no avail. They lock the doors. People were then turned away in large numbers. For several weeks, the ushers maintained the practice of keeping parishioners out of church and dividing the community. Needless to say, the members of the flock were infuriated. The turning point occurred when one of the parishioners, the local fire marshal, was locked out. The following day the pastor received a call from the chancery (Diocesan headquarters). The doors stayed open the following weekend.

“And then the door was locked” (Mt.25:11)

“Lord, Lord, open the door for us” (Mt.25:12)

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt.25:1-13) is the first of three parables of judgment in the gospel of Matthew’s twenty-fifth chapter. No fewer than four times in the narrative do we hear the word “lamps.” According to reputable biblical scholars, the lamps were, in all likelihood, torches, strips of cloth soaked in oil and tied to the end of a stick. The burning light from the torch provides the necessary light for the procession. “Oil” symbolizes good deeds. Earlier, in Our Lord’s unforgettable Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compares good deeds to the light of a lamp that must shine before others. (Mt.5 15-16) In the parable just proclaimed the foolish virgins allow their lamps to burn out and so are not prepared to meet the bridegroom. In the words of a Cistercian monk, “The darkness of the oil less lamps both signify the tragic waste of a life that does not have as an animating principle the truth of Christ’s words and his transforming presence”. They have spent their time foolishly. The lamp’s bright light is a symbol of the Divine Presence and a human heart ablaze with the love of the Lord.

It is not without significance that today’s parable is one of the recommended readings for a funeral mass. Clearly, the “wedding feast” is a splendid image of heaven, and the baptized have been invited to the celebration. However, one must accumulate “oil” for the day of our highly anticipated encounter with the divine bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Our souls must be prepared. The dying of the light is an invitation to disaster!

Another lesson is that one day our earthly pilgrimage will come to an end at the hour of our death. It is then we will be called upon to give an account of our lives. We will be asked how we responded to the many graces given us at baptism. So often it is we who lock the doors of our hearts to the Lord, who desires to draw near to us. We recall the immortal words of blessed Pope John Paul II; “...open wide the doors of your heart to Christ”. In the Book of Revelation, we hear of Christ knocking on the door, and hoping to dine with us. “Here I stand, knocking at the door. If any one hears me calling, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me.” (Rev.3:20)

“Those who were ready went to the wedding feast with him.” (Mt.25:10) The time of preparation is at hand. We must stay awake and be vigilant in our response to the Living Word of God.

Amen!