Homily of 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

We read the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in the Gospel of today. I used to think that the wise virgins were not after all wise enough. I used to wonder that if they were really wise they could have reasoned out a way ten of them would have made use of the five lamps that had oil in them, instead of sending the foolish virgins out in the middle of the night to search for oil. My thought and wondering were mistaken because the parable has deeper, spiritual implications for our guidance. The following imagination was helpful to me: Ten students were in a class. Five of them prepared for an examination; five did not prepare. In the examination hall, the five who did not prepare said to those who prepared, "Please share with us what you are writing so that we can write along with you." What do you think will be the response of the teacher and the five students who prepared for the examination? The parable of the virgins has some lessons for us.

First, I understand the flasks of oil to mean one's personal relationship with God that keeps the person's life flaming and shinning, and leading to everlasting life. The flasks of oil include a person's prayer life, knowledge of the word of God, love of neighbor, devoutness and longing for a virtuous life. With these, the flame of the person's lamp remains alive and burning on his/her life's journey. For example, a person can share with another the word of God, as I am sharing with you now, but anyone who desires the oil of the knowledge of the word of God goes for it; reads it, listens to it, retains it and uses it. A teacher can only show a student the way to knowledge. The student follows that way and acquires knowledge. If the student does not follow the way to knowledge, the student does not acquire knowledge. It is the same case with other virtues.

Second, the parable teaches us the need to think ahead and plan ahead. This means to look beyond the end of one's nose in everything one does. Another parable of Jesus that illustrates this point is Luke 25:28-30, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'" This rule of planning ahead concerns every aspect of our existence. Every animal obeys this rule; which mean that no human being is exempt from the rule. It is foolishness and at one's peril to disregard this rule. Anyone who disobeys this rule pays dearly.

Third, the parable teaches us to remain firm on the right path. The foolish virgins' request represents those suggestions that discourage us from remaining firm on the right path. The foolish virgins' request represents trials and temptations that come our way capable of swaying us away from the right course of action. There are times some requests are clearly to take advantage of us. The parables encourage us to be wise and courageous enough to

decline such requests. There are times some requests are beyond what we can handle. The parable encourages us not to feel guilty for declining to undertake what is beyond our capability.

Fourth, Jesus tells us to stay awake. Stay awake means stay awake in prayer. It means to be vigilant, watchful and alert against the Evil One, his agents and their deceits. It means to be prudent. It means to wise up. Intelligence is empty without wisdom and prudence. Wisdom 9:6 says, “For even if one is perfect among the sons of men, yet without the wisdom that comes from God, he will be regarded as nothing.” Many times, talented and intelligent people get into a lot of trouble because they have not acted wisely and prudently.

Finally, stay awake means to be prepared and be ready for the coming of Jesus to take us to our everlasting home. Jesus asks, “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8). Therefore, we are to be spiritually and physically ready. The points in this homily are some of the ways we can stay awake and also be ready and faithful for the coming of Jesus.

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