

8. November 2020

“The Prudent Virgins”

Mt 25:1-13

Then the kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him." Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "In truth I tell you, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Vigilance is a constant requirement of Scripture. Again and again, and with ever new examples, the Lord tells us to be vigilant.

Vigilance is necessary because we are surrounded by enemies who want our harm.

Vigilance is different from fear and distrust. In fear we are paralysed by the dangers. Mistrust counts firmly on evil everywhere, and is therefore taken over by evil. Vigilance, on the other hand, knows about evil. But the attention is not directed to evil, but to God. That is the decisive difference.

In today's text we are given a very vivid example. All ten virgins are waiting for the bridegroom. They all seem ready to meet him.

But the Bridegroom comes at a different time than expected. When he comes, five virgins are left behind. They have run out of oil and have not provided for the groom, while the other clever virgins are admitted to the groom. This section of the text then ends with the remark: “*So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.*”

If we understand the text in terms of spiritual life, then the life of the prudent virgins must have been authentic. Their faith was obviously deep enough to be prepared even for a long wait. This is what happens when we profoundly base our following of Christ, when it is permanent, when we hold on to it even on those days when it is difficult for us and when Jesus seems to be absent. The oil that the wise virgins had with them is a reminder of the Lord's word: *“Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.”* (Mk 9:50)

We gather oil in reserve when we do good works and are careful that these works are also recognized in order to praise God. Jesus once said: *“Your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.”* (Mt 5:16)

The wise virgins point out that we should be proactive. This does not mean anxiety, but prudence. Christian prudence rethinks its situation from the point of view of whether what I am doing now serves the Kingdom of God, or less, or not at all. One puts even permitted things at the back and in Christian prudence prefers the better works. St. Paul says about this: *“‘Everything is permissible’ [...], but not everything does good. True, everything is permissible, but not everything builds people up.”* (1 Cor 10:23)

The wisdom of such a life form makes our soul more and more inclined to do the better without falling into a cramp. If the soul practises this wise way of life, it becomes more and more stable inwardly and learns in every situation of life to understand God's will and His permissions and to give the right answer in each case. In this way the soul becomes prepared to endure even long periods of drought, like the wise virgins who had oil with them when the bridegroom was late.

Vigilance means to be and remain focused on the essential! We should not slip into the periphery, instead our hearts should be directed towards Christ and remain with him.

A great help for such a path is if we cultivate the prayer life more and more intensely, if we succeed, in God's grace, through intensive practice, in raising our hearts to God and dwelling with Him ever more quickly.

The Holy Spirit who prays in us (*cf. Rom 8:26*) is the oil of our text, which is also available to us when the night is long until the Bridegroom comes: whether in our personal lives or at the end of times, when the Lord comes again.