

Lack of preparations has caused so many disasters. Childbirth happens whether one is ready or not. In college I found out the hard way how absurd it is to take a final exam I was not fully prepared for. How foolish not to prepare when one knows what the future will bring.

Matthew reminds us that Jesus will return again, and it will be foolish and fatal not to be ready. Old Testament prophets prepared Israel for a Messiah. When he came, some joined his kingdom while others were lost in the dust of death. Early Christians expected Jesus to return soon after the Ascension. As weeks of waiting turned into months and years, many became lazy in their lives of faith.

Whether Christ's final arrival to begin the glorious heavenly banquet is at the end of time, or on my last day of life, the result is the same. If I am wise, I will keep my eyes open and be prepared when he knocks at the door. If I am foolish and not prepared, I might not walk through that open door and enter the eternal kingdom. *Grace is a gift, but a faithful response keeps us in that grace!*

In Jesus day, the wedding came when bridegroom was ready and showed up. Everyone knew the day but not the time. When the bridegroom was ready the village followed him in a procession as he went to the home of the bride and her parents gave her to him. Then they walked to the marriage feast and the joyful crowd followed. Once they got to the feast and were all inside, the door was closed. If this happened at night, they needed oil lamps to carry, not only to see, but because no young woman was allowed outside at night without a lamp.

In this parable, ten bridesmaids prepared to meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish, taking their lamps but no extra oil. Wise ones prepared for any surprise by taking extra oil. The bridegroom was delayed. All fell asleep, and lamps started burning out. Suddenly they were awakened. It was time! Those who were wise enough to be prepared entered the banquet. Those who had been foolish were left in the dark and forbidden to participate in the wedding.

Our culture takes leisure time for granted. In Jesus day, leisure time was rare, and time "just for me" would be an especially joyous occasion. Weddings were the best! For bridesmaids, it was even better. They would sit at the head table. They danced in the wedding procession. They carried the lamps and were closest to the joy. *Obviously, preparations made sense.*

Jesus described a scenario of delay. Initial preparations weren't bad, but they weren't ready for a delay. Those who had not brought extra oil were left in the dark. The lack of preparation would keep them from their goal. How foolish! Even more so was their rush back to town to buy oil – at midnight. We don't even catch the irony of that wasted effort. There would be no oil, for at that time

of night everyone was asleep. And even if they found it, the door would already be closed. *Foolishness always leads to more foolishness.*

Our loving God has gifted us with forgiveness and a promise of life forever in his heavenly mansion. Jesus paid the price to offer that surprise. God's Holy Spirit keeps that gift in plain sight for us every day of our lives. We are simply called to believe, to participate in that love, and to share that love as part of our lives. God does the heavy lifting, but we too have a preparation to accept.

No one would dispute that "Convenience Stores" have changed the way we live. In pioneer days (just as in many of the remote parts of our world today) people must prepare for every eventuality and surprise. Without food, fuel, or proper shelter they couldn't last through winter blizzards or summer droughts. We are used to counting on Walmart or Meijer to always be open. That is so symptomatic of a hectic, live-for-the-moment lifestyle that would leave us terribly unprepared for the surprise of a catastrophic event.

This wise preparation in our life of faith goes against the grain of a self-centered culture. Some treat God's gifts like a convenience store. Get baptized, show up when I am out of strength or nourishment AND depend on myself the rest of the time. (I have my own relationship with God and don't need all that he offers.)

But the parable reminds that we do not know when Christ will return, or when we will be called to St. Peter's front door with the news that the banquet has begun! Additionally, every day there are opportunities to celebrate Christ or share his light, we just don't know when those will happen, but must always be prepared.

Just as bridesmaids participated in the wedding by leading the torchlight procession, we are called from baptism to let "our lights shine." As with them, our participation is joyful, but also helpful for others. And when any get left behind or stay in the dark, all suffer as the wedding is not as joyful as it could have been! God's light in us shows the way to others who are confused and lost and hoping for someone to guide them home.

A military chaplain never bought a dress uniform as he thought \$300 was too costly for the few times he would wear it. One afternoon he was asked if he might attend a banquet in Washington. (Why buy a uniform for one night?) He asked another chaplain to go in his place. The next day his friend said he was asked to sit with the President, was given an autograph, and had memories for a lifetime. The first chaplain said, "If I had only known, I would have bought the uniform. But I wasn't prepared and such an opportunity will never come my way again."

As we move toward the end of the year, days are shorter, and nights are longer. The end of another church year reminds us that life gets shorter and death comes closer with each and every breath we take. How dark it would be if the

Sun of God is not the light of our lives, and faith is not the gift which prepares.

My most difficult night in Toledo when my neighbor and best friend died instantly at midnight from a massive heart attack. He had been healthy and active and had a beautiful family at home, but that was the night for him to "go home."

When that moment comes, we can never be too ready. God gives us everything we need. Word. Sacrament. Prayer. The fellowship of the Church. It is foolish not to be prepared. When the moment and hour comes, it will be too late to run to a convenience store for help.

Either one is prepared or not. It isn't about whether you are a good person or not, but rather about your relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Scots have a saying that goes "thatch your roof when the weather is dry!" It is like that for us as well. Be wise. Celebrate your faith. Reach out with Jesus' love that those around you know that the greatest celebration of all will soon begin! That is, after all, what the wise are "getting ready for." And God will help!

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