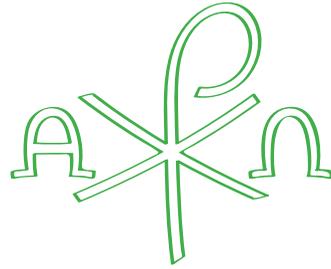


THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Brandon Ross



MATTHEW 25:1-13 ESV

Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the apostle in about 50 A.D. Like the previous week's Gospel, this reading comes in Jesus' last major discourse in Matthew where He speaks about the end times and the final judgement. He delivers this teaching during Holy Week prior to His betrayal and arrest.

¹ [Jesus said,] "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom."

- Another one of the "kingdom of heaven" parables common to Matthew, this parable likens the Holy Church to a bride and Christ Himself to the bridegroom. This theme is picked up by St. Paul who writes concerning earthly marriage, "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32). The love and self-sacrifice of Jesus for His bride is the standard for all earthly husbands.
- In Hebrew marriage practice, the bridegroom would process with his friends to the home of his bride, where he would meet his bride and her attendants. From there they would all together go to the place of the wedding banquet, a joyous feast which would often last many days.
- ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.
- The Scriptures describe wisdom as trust in the Lord God: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" whereas "fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7). The point of the parable's exhortation is to receive the instruction which it gives.

- "This is a parable of warning. It pictures readiness against unreadiness, preparedness against unpreparedness, watchfulness against sleep. All ten maidens seem to be of the company-to-be, all go to the wedding, all go to meet the bridegroom, yet five of them were wise and five foolish....Be ready!" (Fred Lindemann, *The Sermon and the Propers*, 270)

³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

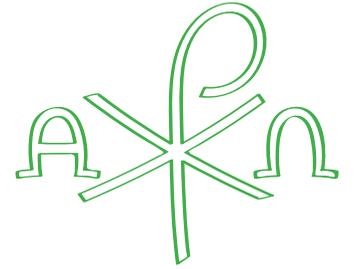
- The foolish virgins did not prepare themselves for a possible delay in the coming of the bridegroom. The wise virgins allowed for the possible delay and thus took extra flasks of oil with them.
- In the same way, the wise Christian is sustained by the means of grace, whereby his faith is kept alive and full, not allowing his trust to grow cold and his oil to run dry.
- ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.
- The wise and foolish together succumb to sleep as they await the bridegroom. Even the disciples fell asleep when they waited with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, showing the inherent weakness of even those who are prepared and love the Lord. (Matthew 26:40-41). Jesus tells His followers to stay awake and watch (vs. 11)

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⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

- Like the bridegroom, Jesus will appear suddenly and without warning on the last day when He comes to judge the living and the dead. “Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning.” (Mark 13:35)

⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

- The virgins prepared their lamps to burn with such brilliant light so as to properly greet the bridegroom. So also the faith given and sustained through the Word and Sacraments greets the coming of the Lord on the last day.

⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’⁹ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’

- Just as the wise virgins cannot give of their own oil to the foolish, so a Christian cannot have faith on behalf of another. Once the Bridegroom comes there is no more time for repentance and faith, but only regret on the part of the foolish that they spurned the gifts of God.
- “For we obtain remission of sins only by the merits of Christ, when we believe in Him. Of the other saints it has been said, 1 Cor. 3:8: Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor, i.e., they cannot mutually bestow their own merits, the one upon the other, as the monks sell the merits of their orders. Even Hilary [of Poitiers] says of the foolish virgins: *And as the foolish virgins could not go forth with their lamps extinguished, they besought those who were prudent to lend them oil; to whom they replied that they could not give it because peradventure there might not be enough for all; i.e., no one can be aided by the works and merits of another, because it is necessary for every one to buy oil for his own lamp.*” (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XXI:29-30)

¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.

- In the Scriptures, heaven is often compared to a wedding feast. “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.” (Revelation 19:7) Indeed the Lord’s Supper is described in the Lutheran liturgy as “a foretaste of the feast to come.”

- Those prepared for the coming of the Lord are received into the eternal feast. But those who refused to be ready are shut out.

- “They rejoice at the bridegroom’s marriage; and yet they themselves are the bride. In the bridal chamber of the eternal kingdom God is joined to our sight; and this sight will never be parted from the embraces of His love.” (St. Gregory the Great, *Homily 10 on Matthew 25*)

¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’¹² But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

- The words “Truly, I say to you” is an idiomatic saying of Jesus Himself. He is indeed the very Bridegroom who is to come and take His bride, the Church to Himself.
- The exhortation to watch is a constant call to vigilance and repentance. The Christian is not to delay repentance or delay receiving the gifts of Christ which strengthen faith. Rather he is to embrace them often, receiving them with thanksgiving. By the Word and Sacraments the Church fills her lamp with the oil of trust in the Lord, that she would be ready to receive her Bridegroom when He comes again.
- “No one will notice that the hour is at hand that the Father has kept to Himself. Then all at once, the light of eternity bursts forth into time. The shout of the archangel and the angels’ loud trumpets resound in thousand-fold echo along the ancient mountains. Suddenly everything comes to an end – all cares, all rejoicing, all sighing and crying and working. The world becomes silent: every eye looks heavenward and sees and recognizes in the midst of the angels the One whose concealed life is now revealed.” (Wilhelm Löhe, *The Word Remains: Selected Writings on the Church Year and the Christian Life*, 37)



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