

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 1st 2017

Mathew 25:1-13

The parable that Matthew put at the beginning of chapter 25 is an exhortation of Jesus to those who followed Him. It is a story in which the nuptial metaphor is used, most probably with reference to the context of the time in Israel. At that time, it was customary for the groom to go out and find the bride in her paternal house and for them to walk together to the groom's house, which was usually the house where the new marriage was established. The maidens of the bride left her house and escorted them with burning torches, while the maidens of the bridegroom awaited, also with burning torches, the procession of the bride and groom. When the bride and groom arrived, the wedding banquet began.

It is right at this part of the nuptial liturgy that we can place the beginning of the story. The Gospel distinguishes between foolish and prudent maidens directing attention to the contrast between the two female groups and preventing the reader from identifying with the senseless maidens.

What is the distinction that Matthew places on the lips of Jesus? The foolish adjective is used by Matthew about six times, mostly in a comparative sense and expresses the idea of someone whose limited view of reality does not allow him to welcome the novelty of the Kingdom of God in the works of Jesus. On the other hand, the prudent adjective is used seven times in a comparative sense to highlight those who are assiduous at the invitation of Jesus and therefore have welcomed the Kingdom of God, allowing them to base their hopes on the promise of salvation through Jesus.

The metaphor of the wedding banquet expresses the next time of salvation that begins in Jesus and is consummated with judgment at the end of time. The mention of the door is strange, since closing a door at a wedding in a Jewish (or Eastern) village, where the whole community participates, does not make much sense. However, this mention is key to visually understanding the consequences of which, Jesus warns through the parable.

The call of attention rests on the "now" of life; it is the participation today in the time of salvation, which is the time of the presence of Jesus. He who is not prepared - has no oil - can lose the Kairos of the joy that he has initiated with the presence of Jesus. The delay of the groom refers to a Parousia (second coming of Jesus) that has not yet arrived and will come unpredictably. The one who accepts with an assiduous heart the presence of Jesus, despite the difficulties that shake the faith, is the one who has taken advantage of the time, knowing to emphasize the most important things.

The important thing is not the call, but the answer. It is not the torch, but the oil. The promise of salvation is no more important than the presence of Jesus, for his presence is the beginning of the desired salvation. The Gospel closes with an existential imperative "watch" which consists of fixing the gaze attentively, being prudent and astute, discovering that the presence of Jesus is the time of ultimate joy.

It is a call to discern in our lives what realities, people, objects and pleasures interfere, as obstacles to living fully, in the joy of the presence of the one Who transforms us. It is not a presence that is reduced to a phobic affectivity that can sometimes be confused with our own consciousness. Rather, it is the real, liberating and compromising presence - which is always affective and effective - and which

makes us bearers of joy and hope in our reality.

Whoever welcomes the presence of Jesus and lives with his heart centered on Him, is the one who lives with his torch burning and replenished with oil to bear witness that God is really close to us, where we are, and that the remoteness of God is incomprehensibility of His omnipresent closeness. God is sweet there. Is near. With his love, he lightly brushes the heart and moves us to live the present with joy - embracing the difficulties - projecting with hope the tomorrow that awaits us. Today is a good opportunity to evaluate our oil: do I live my life of prayer with intensity and seriousness? Do I joyfully celebrate the Eucharist? What are my obstacles to living in the freedom of God's presence and how do I deal with them? How is my reading of the Word of God? How are my works? Good ... bad? what attitudes should I improve in the treatment of others?

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