

Lesson 16

Proper 27

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:1–13

The parable of the ten virgins warns Christians to be wise and watchful, ready for their Lord's return in glory. Combine it with the parable of the talents, which follows it, and you know clearly that Christian watchfulness is not a matter of lazy waiting, but calls us to faithful use of all Jesus has entrusted to us as we work and wait expectantly for Him.

The story base of the parable is that of a grand Jewish wedding. In Jewish society of that day, it was the betrothal, the formal agreement between two families or two individuals, that was the legally binding action. Though the betrothed continued to live in their separate homes and families for a time—sometimes for as long as a year—they were legally husband and wife. Then, on a scheduled evening, the bridegroom and his friends went in festive procession to the home of the bride to bring her and her maiden companions in procession to the groom's house for the consummation of the marriage with its days of wedding festivities. This story speaks to all Christians (ten is the Bible's number of completeness) as we watch and wait for our heavenly Bridegroom to take us, His Bride, the Church, to the heavenly wedding feast.

244. What is the point around which the parable turns?

245. What is the oil that will ensure that our lamps, our lives, will be burning brightly when Jesus returns as Bridegroom and King?

246. What is suggested by the fact that all ten thought they were ready for the bridegroom, but the foolish ones learned only when it was too late that they were not properly prepared for his coming? (See Matthew 7:21–23.)

247. What is stressed by the fact that the wise virgins could not share their oil with the foolish ones?

248. Where can we get oil for our life-lamps that will have them burning brightly with faith, hope, and love as we wait for our Lord? (See Matthew 11:27–30; 2 Timothy 3:14–17.)

A daily practice of Dr. Horatio Bonar reminds us that we should live with a sense of urgency as we watch and wait. His last act each night before lying down to sleep was to draw aside the curtain and, looking up into the night sky, ask, “Tonight, Lord?” In the morning, his first movement was to look out the window at the dawn and ask, “Today, Lord?”

The Old Testament Lesson: Amos 5:18–24

Amos, whose name means “burden” or “burden bearer,” was God’s prophet to the Northern Kingdom, Israel, 760–750 BC—some thirty years before its fall to Assyria. Amos explained that he was not a professional prophet, but had been a farm worker in the wilderness of Judah when the word of the Lord came to him and he was ordered to go and preach to Israel. Israel was enjoying a time of prosperity, but the prosperity only tended to encourage her religious and moral corruption. Idolatry was practiced alongside the worship of Yahweh at Bethel; there was extravagant indulgence in luxurious living; immorality was rampant; there was frequent corruption of judicial procedures; and oppression of the poor was the order of the day. All the while, the people of Israel and their leaders clung to a false sense of security because of their empty religious rituals. They saw their prosperity as evidence of the Lord’s approval and blessing. Amos called them to repentance and warned that God’s patience with them was at an end.

249. What were the expectations of the people as they waited for the Day of the Lord? How did Amos try to burst their bubble of false expectation?

250. What point did Amos make with the man running from a lion, only to be confronted by a bear, and a man entering a house and leaning against a wall, only to be bitten by a serpent?

251. How could the Lord say “I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies” and “I will not accept [your offerings]” when He was the one who had commanded them to carry out such religious duties?

252. What did the Lord point to as prerequisites for acceptable worship?

253. What is suggested by the rolling waters and the ever-flowing stream in terms of God's people offering Him acceptable worship?

254. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

It is evident in the New Testament that many of the first generation of Christians expected the return of Jesus in glory during their lifetime. In Thessalonica, some even quit working and just spent their days talking about and waiting for Jesus' coming. In time, they became a burden to the other members of the congregation, and Paul dealt frankly with them in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15.

As time passed and Jesus did not return and some of the Christians died, there was concern that those who were not alive to greet the returning Lord would miss out on the promised glory. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to allay these fears and to instruct them in more detail about the hope of eternal life that is shared by all Christians—those living and those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. We who live almost two thousand years after Jesus promised “I will come again and will take you to Myself” (John 14:3) are surely blessed by Paul's words. It is understandable that they have been included in the traditional Order of Burial for Christians.

255. What is implicit in Paul's speaking of the death of Christians as their “falling asleep”?

256. What hope sustains us as Christians and makes our grieving for departed loved ones different from the grieving of “others . . . who have no hope”? What is the solid basis of this hope? (See 1 Corinthians 15:17–23.) What assurance is there for us in Paul's “God will bring with [Jesus] those who have fallen asleep”? (See 2 Corinthians 5:1–10.)

257. Why did Paul emphasize that Christians who are alive at the time of the Lord's coming will have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep?

258. What is the point of the “cry of command, . . . the voice of an archangel, and . . . the sound of the trumpet of God” at the time the Lord will come down from heaven?

259. What is the significance of being caught up in the clouds and meeting the Lord in the air to be with Him forever? (See 1 Corinthians 15:50–57.)