

Non transferable reserves

Waiting...it's something we do a lot. But then each one of us has been waited for too, the nine months before we were born.

The moment life begins, more waiting and expecting begins. Expectations from the parents for their children, and as they grow up from the children themselves: waiting for exam results, waiting for a place in university or college, waiting for test results, for reunion with loved ones...

Waiting for something to happen; for something to begin, for something to end. And for waiting, patience is needed. If we have it, it's often only in small doses.

The parable of the ten girls shows us that there are different ways of waiting. Ten young girls are waiting for the groom to come. They are looking forward to his arrival, but then...where is He?...Is he still coming?... Why does it take Him so long?....Their patience is challenged.

The ten girls stand for us, who are waiting for the heavenly groom, in whom we believe; in whose words we believe. And He did say that He was going to come back...But when...?

The girls, all ten, fall asleep. As we do, while waiting. As the disciples did...in Gethsemane, when Jesus asked them to watch with Him, while He was

going down a bit further, to pray to His Father. His hour of suffering and dying had come, His betrayer was on his way, and he was expected by Jesus.

Jesus prayed

³⁹ “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. (Matthew 26: 39-44)

This man of Nazareth, the Son of God, was deeply troubled. But this very same man, is the groom we are expecting, as a congregation, as individuals.

What we can learn from the ten girls is *how* we can wait. And this is where wisdom comes in. As we heard it through our Old Testament reading. You see what you see when you see something white. The same when you see something black. But when you see them next to each other, then you see the stark contrast, as we are shown the stark

contrast between wisdom and its opposite, which in the bible is called 'folly'.

Wisdom and Folly, personified in two women, are put next to each other, to show how they are opposites in how they live : with or without the fear of the Lord. Wisdom says:

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is
insight. (Proverbs 9: 10)*

That doesn't mean that being wise means being scared of the Lord. It means that when we live with reverence for Him, He can equip us with what we need, to do what He expects us to do, for Him and with Him. When what we think, say and do are rooted within that reverence, then wisdom, as the Bible has it, emerges.

And that takes us to the five wise girls. There are times that you need to live from your reserves. Your spiritual reserves. They are needed when we go through difficult times: times of illness, times of loss, times of grief, mourning the loss of a loved one... Events in life that turn your life upside down. One set back after the other. Do we have the spiritual reserves that we then need? For that is what the oil in the lamps stands for. And that is why the five wise girls cannot give any of their oil to the other

five girls. It's not that they are selfish. This parable is about non transferable reserves,

Faith is not like a pen, not like a bit of sugar, or a car that you can borrow from someone when you need it. It doesn't work that way with faith.

Your personal relationship with God is, first of all, something between you and Him. It's no one else's and you cannot give a bit of it to someone else.

You may say, yes, but...but what about the end of the parable? These five girls who are left on the street, in the night, in the dark.

Waiting...again...for what?

This is a parable with an ungracious end. With a harsh judgment.

But thank God, that the Judge of all judges, is a Judge with a beating heart. And because of that heart, a new day always comes. A new beginning.

The sun rises again after each night. Maybe these girls have learned. Maybe their eyes are opened. Maybe they think: we shouldn't have been so complacent. We should have thought of having with us enough oil. Is it too late for them...? Is this being left in the dark, the final judgment?

Maybe they saw in the dark someone passing them. And when it started to get light, as the sun started to rise, they saw it was the groom, in torn clothes,

injured from being beaten, wounded...carrying a cross. Thrown out of His own wedding feast, for that is what the gospel writer tells after the chapter of which this parable forms part.

Jesus is thrown into the darkness by His own people.

Maybe...the five girls, seeing Him, followed Him. After all, they knew how it felt to be left in the darkness.

Do we learn from our mistakes...? This parable with judgment at its end, is an urging to learn from it, so *that*, when He comes back, we will have built, with Him, on our non transferable reserves, like the five wise girls, and we will follow Him into the wedding feast.

The passage ends with

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.(Matthew 25:13)

He appears when we don't expect Him. Let's be warned, and remain spiritually alert, awake, by letting Him be the force of our lives, so that strong in faith, we will be found by Him when He comes.

Amen

