



## Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time A November 8, 2020

- ◆ True Wisdom
- ◆ At Heaven's Gate
- ◆ A Hopeful Grieving
- ◆ The Amazing Witness

### True Wisdom

The following reflection is by Fr. Denis McBride, C.Ss.R., an English Redemptorist priest.

Herbert Hoover served as President of the United States from 1929 until 1933, and was in office during the Great Depression. His encouragement of big business led to a handful of companies, including Standard Oil, controlling a large portion of the country's wealth. The Wall Street crash in October 1929 indicated the failure of this policy, and the subsequent depression revealed Hoover's lack of political foresight. He believed the setback was only temporary, and he declared at the height of the collapse that "the fundamental business of the country ... is on a sound and prosperous basis." Not surprisingly, he was decisively beaten in the 1932 presidential election. Years later, speaking with the voice of experience, Hoover reflected:

*Wisdom consists not so much in knowing what to do in the ultimate as in knowing what to do next.*

Wisdom is the theme of two of the readings today. In the first reading wisdom is personified as a mysterious woman who is never far from those who look for her. Lady Wisdom is near, she lingers at people's gates and doors, she waits to be consulted on all manner of things, she walks the street looking for those who are worthy of her. She is portrayed not as a rare and elusive being but as a resource within everyone's reach. Like common sense. She is invisible to those who don't expect to find wisdom at the heart of experience.

### Oil crisis

When it comes to wisdom, many people shy away from the subject in the belief that it is the proper

concern of philosophers or poets. But if wisdom is about knowing what to do next, it clearly concerns all of us. And the parable of the ten bridesmaids and their oil lamps confirms this view. The Gospel story about a small oil crisis in the Middle East tells us of five bridesmaids who are accounted foolish precisely because they weren't prepared for what happened next.

In the story it would seem that the bride awaits the arrival of the bridegroom at her own home. Her friends, acting as bridesmaids, are to meet the bridegroom when he comes with his friends, then join in escorting the couple back to the bridegroom's house, where the wedding feast will be celebrated. But, as happens at many weddings, there is a hitch; and, as happens at few of our weddings, it is the bridegroom who is late. All ten bridesmaids have lamps and all the lamps have oil. Five of the bridesmaids, however, have no reserve supply of oil. They are unprepared for any delay.

[Used with permission granted by Denis McBride C.Ss.R., *Seasons of the Word.*]

The following two reflections on today's reading are by Fr. Flor McCarthy, S.D.B. (Salesians of Don Bosco).

### At Heaven's Gate

The other night I found myself walking towards the gate of heaven. On the way there I ran into some figures in the dark who were crying. "Why are you crying?" I asked. "We're crying because the Lord refused to let us in. He said he didn't know us," they replied. I arrived at the gate to find it locked. So with some hesitation and no little trepidation I rang the bell, knowing that it was the Lord himself who would answer.

As I stood there waiting, a terrifying question arose in my mind: Will he know me? Of course he'll know me! Ah, yes, but will he recognize me as a disciple of his? That's the question. And it's one I can't do anything about now. It's too late to change anything. I dreaded the thought that I might find myself excluded, an outsider, alone.

What's he going to look for? I asked myself. Then I thought of the parable of the lamps. He will look for a lamp that is burning brightly. What have I done with my lamp? "Oh, good, I still have it," I exclaimed. But when I looked at it I found to my horror that it had gone out.

However, at that moment I woke up to find that it was only a dream. What a relief! It was just a warning that the Lord in his goodness had given me to wake me up, to shake me out of my sloth and carelessness.

Wouldn't it be terrible to arrive at heaven's door, to knock and then to have the Lord come out and say to you, "I do not know you," and you find yourself outside alone in the dark, while inside all is light, joy, community, and celebration.

What lamp are we talking about? Essentially, it is the lamp of love. Love, in order to be genuine, doesn't have to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired or cynical.

How does a lamp burn? Through a continuous input of small drops of oil. If the drops of oil cease, the lamp will go out. What are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life: faithfulness, punctuality, small words of kindness, a thought for others, our way of being silent, of looking, of speaking, and of acting. These are the drops of love that keep our religious life burning like a lively flame.

Jesus shared our life, our loneliness, our anguish, our death. He is not far away from us. He is very close to us. We can touch, serve, and love him every day of our lives. With the oil of prayer and good works we must keep the lamp of faith burning, and he will recognize us. We won't be judged on a momentary lapse, but on our life as a whole.

Since we do not know the day nor the hour of the Lord's coming, we must be prepared so that when he comes we can enter his kingdom. To be prepared means to be a doer rather than a mere hearer of the Word.

All that Jesus says to us in this parable is meant as a warning. This warning is a sign of his love for us. It tells us that every moment should be beautiful. That the soul should always be ready for the coming of the Bridegroom, always waiting for the voice of the Beloved.

## A Hopeful Grieving

While the Gospel is talking about rejoicing, the Second Reading is talking about grieving. Both are part of life and can be very close to each other. Today I may be attending a wedding, tomorrow a funeral.

The early Christians believed that Jesus would return soon and take them all to heaven. This made it difficult for them to accept the death of some of their members before Jesus returned in glory. In the Second Reading we heard Paul reassuring the Thessalonians. He tells them that as surely as God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus will raise those who have died, and present them to God in the final showing of his Kingdom.

But meanwhile they are grieving. What should be their attitude to grief? He didn't tell the Thessalonians that they should not grieve. What he said to them was: "Do not grieve like those who have no hope." Grief is not an easy thing to handle. You still find people who directly or indirectly discourage it.

Vincent had recently lost his wife, and was now living on his own. He was still in the early stages of a very deep grief. Her death left not only a great void in his life, but a great silence too.

To their credit, his grown children visited him regularly. However, they made sure not to bring up the one subject he desperately wanted and needed to talk about, namely, the death of his wife. They said they didn't want to upset him. So they acted as if nothing had happened, and expected him to do the same. Even though they meant well, they were not helping him. He had to do his grief-work. That grief was all the greater for not being shared.

Grief follows the loss of a loved one as surely and naturally as night follows day. Grief is one of the strongest emotions we will ever experience. Many people have a problem about expressing grief, and may try to suppress it. To suppress grief is dangerous, and can result in serious emotional problems.

To live fruitfully after the death of a loved one, people need to go through a period of mourning. The way to deal with grief is not to run away from it, or pretend it isn't there, but to face it and work through it with as much honesty and courage as one can.

Those who do this will emerge enriched as a person. Grief has a great purgative value. God cannot fill the soul until it is emptied of trivial concerns. And a great grief is a tremendous bonfire in which all the trash of life is consumed.

Faith should not be used as a barrier against grief. Sometimes people say about someone who does not grieve, “What great faith he (she) has!” But even Christ grieved. To grieve over the loss of a loved one is a good and necessary thing.

While faith doesn’t do away with the necessity of grieving, it is a wonderful comfort and support at a time of death. Paul says, “We believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Christ.... Comfort one another with these thoughts.” Faith doesn’t dispense us from grieving. What it does do is enable us to grieve with hope.

There’s no escaping the work of grief, and there can be no economizing in that work. If we suppress it now, it will burst out later, when there’s another death to mourn or another anniversary.

We mustn’t be afraid to cry, to let ourselves go. It’s part of the healing. We have tears in our eyes but hope in our hearts. If we do the work of grief, we will wake up one morning, liberated and full of energy for life.

The wedding feast to which Jesus invites us will be all the more joyful for those who have walked through the dark valley of grief, and emerged with the lamp of love still burning brightly.

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## The Amazing Witness

### Mother Mary Walsh (1850-1922)

Founder, Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor

Mary Walsh, a young Irish woman whose parents died when she was an infant, immigrated to New York in 1869. There she found work as a laundress and, under the influence of the Dominican pastor of her parish, joined the Third Order of St. Dominic.

One day in 1876, while on her way to work, Mary heard a young girl crying. Following the child to her apartment she found the girl’s mother lying sick on a mattress on the floor with a dead newborn baby at her side and three other hungry children with no one to care for them. Their father was in jail. Mary decided to drop all else while she cared for the family, nursing the mother, even finding a job for the father when he got out of jail. Though in the meantime she had lost her own job, Mary had found her vocation.

With the support of her parish, Mary gathered a group of coworkers who supported themselves doing laundry while visiting the sick poor in their homes. Although the women barely scraped by themselves, these women, who called themselves Friends of the Sick Poor, devoted themselves in every way to those in need—regardless of race, religion, or lack thereof.

In 1910 they were recognized as a Dominican Congregation, and Mary became mother superior—though not before she had submitted humbly to training as a novice. She died on November 6, 1922.

*“What a privilege it is to work for the sick poor!”*

-Mother Mary Walsh

[Robert Ellsberg, *Blessed Among Us: Day By Day with Sainly Witnesses*, a *Give Us This Day* book (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), Page 633. Used with permission.]

Have a blessed week,

