

“No, for there may not be enough for us and you.” Today I want to preach on a basic challenge for us when hearing this parable -- why wouldn't the wise virgins share with the foolish ones? Isn't the Golden Rule to do to others what you would have them do to you? Doesn't Jesus say that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself? These young girls have spent the night together, they are looking forward to the wedding. Yes, some of them haven't planned well – but that's what friends are for, right? And yet Jesus seems to approve of the wise virgins' refusal to share their oil. He locks out those without burning lamps from the wedding feast – the very Kingdom of Heaven. Why?

To answer that question, the first thing we must understand is what the oil the virgins are carrying represents. The oil does not symbolize the virgins' material resources, their time, or even their love – all things we are indeed meant to give away. Instead, we should think

of the oil as God's grace given to us to fill our souls, unite them to Him, and make them burn brightly with God's life.

At their baptisms, Catholics (or their godparents) are given a lighted candle, being told by the priest, "You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of the light and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts. When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom." These lamps of the ten virgins, then, are like our baptismal candles, representing that state of grace we first received at our baptism, the sharing in the life of God Himself. We're meant to keep these flames lit until we can out to meet Jesus at the end of our lives. We can't risk letting that light go out, lose that relationship with Jesus – which happens when we seriously sin.

To return to the parable and the foolish virgins, yes, we are called to be charitable to all people. We're to show mercy and sacrifice for them. That is certainly Jesus' teaching. But that's not Jesus' point in the parable. His point is that we can't risk our own souls and salvation in

trying to help others. We can't risk letting our candles go out – even for the sake of our companions in life whom we may very well love. We can, and should, risk our wealth for them, our health. We're to lay down even our very lives for our brothers and sisters. But not our souls. Our own salvation can never be sacrificed, because our salvation is God's will for us, and we can never morally act against God's will.

The basic principle is that we cannot commit sin, even for what we think is the good of someone else. The end never justifies the means, if the means involves sin. Let me give you some practical examples of this teaching. Someone, let's say a woman in this case, is in love with a man. She hopes to marry him. She knows that they should not engage in premarital sex. That is a serious sin and against God's plan for them. It could endanger her soul. But the man doesn't understand this. He doesn't see anything wrong in sleeping together before marriage. He pressures her. So, she convinces herself that it won't be that bad to have sex with him. After all, he might leave her if

she doesn't. Plus, if they marry she thinks he'll become a Catholic someday. In fact, she tells herself, she's probably saving him by sleeping with him. That's what sharing one's oil looks like in this case.

Or there are married couples where one spouse is Catholic and the other is a nothing, and, say in this case, the non-religious wife refuses to go to a Catholic church with her Catholic husband. She's had a bad experience with Catholics, or has heard troubling things about the Catholic Church. But since he's religious she would be willing to split the difference by going to some other church with the Catholic husband if he is willing to compromise and leave the Catholic Church. And the Catholic decides to leave the Catholic faith, thinking, "At least she'll be going to some church. In fact, I'm probably saving her!" That's also a case of sharing one's oil.

Those are big examples, but the general principle of never sinning, even to supposedly help someone else, applies to lesser cases. I've heard of many people who are hosting friends or family members who

aren't Catholic, and they don't go to mass on Sunday because it would be bad manners, or they're even embarrassed, so they skip mass. Or how many times have we lied about little things, because we thought it would make someone else happy?

If we consider such sins at all, we may assume that we can always clear things up with God later. But another theme of the parable is that we don't know when the Bridegroom is coming. The foolish virgins lose heaven because they, literally, get caught napping.

Our relationship with Jesus, the life of supernatural grace, is our greatest gift from God. It lights our lamps. Our lives are meant to shine with that light – our whole lives long. At our baptisms, when we were told, “Keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts. When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom,” we are meant to remember this very parable. Have we put that flame at risk by sinning for what we thought were good reasons? Are we wise or foolish with our souls' lamps and oil?