

Sunday of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time – A  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
12 November 2017

Wisdom 6:12-16  
Psalm 63  
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  
(Matthew 24:42a, 44) Matthew 25:1-13

*The Parable of the Ten Virgins – No One Can Pray for You*

This past week Ms. Gerrety and the eighth grade class invited me, along with our Principal, Ms. Degel, and our IT Director, Mr. Gallant, to be “sharks” in their classroom version of *Shark Tank*. Maybe you have seen or heard about this popular television show called *Shark Tank*.<sup>1</sup> Each week entrepreneurs venture into the “shark tank” in order to make a pitch to the “sharks” – successful and wealthy businessmen and women – hoping to convince them to invest in their innovative business ideas.

Over a couple days we watched sixteen different presentations from the eighth graders. All of us sharks were truly impressed by how well-prepared, thoughtful, creative, and passionate the students were about their business ideas. I was also impressed by the high level of technology utilized by the students, much of it unfamiliar to me. One recurring theme that I noticed amongst the variety of business ideas was that many of them featured a product that did something *for you*:

Tired of wheeling heavy luggage through the airport?  
A suitcase with a motor that moves your luggage *for you*.  
Sometimes forget to take your trash out to the curb in the morning?  
A trashcan that can be programmed to take out the trash *for you*.  
Constantly losing your papers and homework?  
A binder that sorts, scans, and saves your papers *for you*.

Our students’ business ideas came out of their creativity, ingenuity, and from a desire to make life just a little bit easier. To help save time and stress, by doing a task *for you*.

We see examples of those kinds of inventions throughout human history and all around us. Many of them so common that we don’t think much about them: doors that open *for you*;

machines in our homes that wash dishes and clothes *for you*; cars that parallel park *for you*; and, coming soon, cars that even drive *for you*. There are even some inventions out there that maybe aren't quite as useful, such as: a motorized ice cream cone that rotates the ice cream scoop *for you*; or a mechanical hand that pets your pet *for you*.

Over in the rectory kitchen, Fr. Steve has a pretty useful gadget: the Tornado, which opens cans *for you*. It's incredible! I don't know how it does it, but you just set it on top of the can, press a button, and it zips around like a little tornado, cutting off the lid. I'm not so good at operating it (and I'm a little bit afraid of it) so I ask Fr. Steve for his help.

There are all kinds of inventions out there that exemplify human creativity and ingenuity. Inventions that make life a little easier, less stressful, and that do things *for you*. But there are also things in life that simply cannot be done *for you*. That no invention or gadget or other person can do *for you*. Some things we simply have to do for ourselves.

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Last year while I was in seminary, our Director of Spirituality gave us a conference to start the new seminary year.<sup>ii</sup> After a summer away from seminary, he gave us some encouragement and some reminders about setting goals for our formation and our spiritual growth for the coming year. Steps we could take for growing closer in our relationship with God. Resources available to us at the seminary to help us more clearly hear His call in our lives; better able to answer the big question about our life: *How is God calling me to love and serve in this world? Is God calling me to be a priest?* His talk had two main parts to it:

- 1) He assured us that he was there to help us, to support us, and to connect us with the resources we needed to help us grow in holiness and closer in relationship to God.
- 2) He told us very plainly that he could not do those things *for us*. He could help us along the way – but, ultimately, *we* had to do the things it would take to grow in holiness and closer in relationship to God.

For example, he said to us:

“Gentlemen, if you want to be healthy and be thinking clearly, I can’t do that *for you*. I can encourage you, but I can’t sleep *for you*; I can’t eat *for you*; I can’t exercise *for you*. *You* have to get yourself to bed at night; *you* have to eat the right kinds of food; *you* have to get some exercise each week.

If you want to learn and do well on your exams and papers, I can’t do that *for you*. I can teach you, but I can’t study *for you*. *You* have to pay attention in class; *you* have to sit down at your desk; *you* have to turn your work in on time.

Most importantly, if you want to grow closer to God and better hear how He might be calling you in your vocation, I can’t do that *for you*. I can’t pray *for you*. *You* have to come to Mass and go to Confession; *you* have to spend time in the chapel; *you* have to have conversations with God and develop *your* relationship with Him.”

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The five foolish virgins in the parable Jesus told us today learned this very same lesson. Maybe at first hearing, the parable is a bit confusing. Why are the wise virgins being so stingy and selfish with their oil?<sup>iii</sup> Doesn’t Jesus want us to help others? Especially, to give to people in need? Didn’t He say something about “...whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me?”<sup>iv</sup> Why are the wise virgins looking out for themselves while the others are being locked out of the wedding feast?<sup>v</sup>

If the wise virgins could explain themselves further to the foolish virgins, they might say something like: “My friends, if you want to come to the wedding feast, I can give you advice, I can support you, I can pray for you, I can help you prepare...but I can’t do it *for you*.” There are simply some things in life that cannot be borrowed from others; that someone else cannot do *for you*.<sup>vi</sup> That oil, that fuel that keeps the lamps of our souls burning, that is something that we have to keep filled ourselves.

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We certainly cannot do this alone, and Jesus does not leave us alone to figure it all out. First and foremost, He gives us the sacraments to help us. The Eucharist nourishes us and gives us the fuel we need for the journey.<sup>vii</sup> Confession gives us a “tune up”; it repairs and heals our relationships with God and one another.<sup>viii</sup> But no one can receive Eucharist *for you*. That’s why it is so important to come to Mass and receive Eucharist every Sunday – and during the week, if possible. And no one can go to Confession *for you*. That’s why here at Holy Family we offer Confession so frequently, Monday through Saturday, and by appointment, if needed.

Jesus also gives us our parish to help us. Before Mass we all heard about numerous opportunities for all of us to get involved in, learn about, and grow in our faith: classes, guest speakers, faith sharing groups, youth retreats, Perpetual Adoration in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel...

Jesus also gives us one another. Together we are the Body of Christ. We are called to help one another, to listen to one another, to console one another, to celebrate together.

God gives us all of these gifts so that we can know of His love for us and share that love with others. So that we can be filled with fuel – with oil – that is His love. So that the light of our soul can burn brightly, so that we know God, so that we are prepared to meet Him when He comes to take us home. We have a lot of things to help us do this, but we have to make the decision for ourselves. No one can do this *for us*.

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A few days ago, I met a man at Union Gospel Mission in Seattle. I liked the way he introduced himself. He said, “Hi, my name is Michael. I have completed the drug addiction recovery program here, and now I can say: *I do participate in my own life today.*” That is what Jesus is calling all of us to today: *to participate in our own life today.* All of us, myself

included, have lots of things going on, many things that distract us. Some of those things we'd like to be done automatically *for us*. But let's all make a decision to pay attention to and do the things that no one can do *for us*. To take advantage of the supports, resources, and helps that Jesus offers to us. To take time to learn about Jesus, to talk to Jesus in prayer, and to have our lamps filled with oil by a relationship with Jesus. Let's all make a decision to *fully participate* in our own life today!

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<sup>i</sup> *Shark Tank*, ABC Television Network, created by Mark Burnett (2009 – present)

<sup>ii</sup> Father William Dillard, *Spiritual Conference*, Saint Joseph Chapel, Mount Angel Seminary, Saint Benedict, Oregon, 12 September 2016

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 25:9

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 25:40

<sup>v</sup> Matthew 25:10-12

<sup>vi</sup> See William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2 Revised Edition*, 320-321: "But the parable has at least two universal warnings.

(i) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute...

(ii) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil, when they discovered they needed it. A man cannot borrow a relationship with God; he must possess it for himself. A man cannot borrow a character; he must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have amassed. There are certain things we must win or acquire for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others."

<sup>vii</sup> CCC 1392, 1394

<sup>viii</sup> CCC 1455, 1458, 1468-1470