

# LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

**November 25 2018**

Isaiah 65:17-25

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

Matthew 25:1-13

## ***Standing...***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing the day President Kennedy was assassinated? If you were alive, you do...

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing the morning of 9/11?  
If you were alive, you do...

You might not remember your anniversary date,  
the birthdays of your children,  
even what you ate for dinner last night—but you remember those days.

Our focus yet again is on the Last Day—the Day that everyone—  
and I mean everyone whose ever been born will experience and remember  
for the rest of eternity.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

## ***Sitting...***

Our Gospel lesson takes place during Holy Week,  
where Jesus speaks to His disciples about many things,  
but especially, of the need to be watchful, ready for His return.

This is the capstone of His teaching.

For the main character—the Bridegroom  
does what He promised He'd do—He returns.

Once the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus,  
“Why don't Your disciples fast?”  
Jesus answered by referring to Himself as the Bridegroom saying,

“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?  
 Then Jesus adds, “The days will come when the bridegroom  
 is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matthew 9:15).  
 This is the time in which we currently live.  
 When the Bridegroom is gone,  
 but He will most assuredly return.

To emphasize this,  
 Jesus speaks of ten young girls—five wise / five foolish,  
 on their way to a wedding ceremony,  
 no doubt, giddy with delight.

Since receiving the invitation to be bridesmaids,  
 they expect nothing but tea and cake  
 and posting their pictures on social media.

Prior to this,  
 the bridegroom and bride would have been betrothed by their parents—  
 During the betrothal,  
 the bridegroom would return to his father’s house and build onto it,  
 making preparations for his future wife.  
 Before leaving to do so the bridegroom would tell his beloved,  
 “I go to prepare a place for you,  
 I will come again and receive you to Myself;  
 that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

Then, at a specified time, the bridegroom, along with his friends, would go with festival  
 procession to the home of the bride. There they would meet her and her friends and all  
 would process together to their new home for the consummation of the marriage and  
 wedding festivities.

So, the bridesmaids—both wise and foolish—have all arrived,  
 but what the foolish did not plan on was  
 the Bridegroom being delayed.

No worries—girl-talk and giggles go on into the evening.  
 Lamps are lit and,  
 the wedding party—well, it turns into a slumber party:  
 for all ten get drowsy, eyelids get heavy,  
 heads nod and eventually, they sack out.

First-century lamps were small—they could fit in the palm of your hand. They weren't made to burn all night. Which is why the wise girls, the sensible girls, bring extra oil.

It's not that they were smarter or scored higher on their SAT than the others,  
 it's that they know this Bridegroom.  
 If He said He'll be at the wedding, He'll be at the wedding,  
 and they anticipated a delay.

You know, when you read the letters of St. Paul,  
 early on he writes like the return of Christ is going to happen in his lifetime—  
 that he'll be alive to see it (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

But then, later on, in his last letter, 2 Timothy, St. Paul realizes,  
 that might not be the case.  
 That he most likely will sleep the sleep of death before the Bridegroom returns.  
 2 Timothy is where we have those familiar words, (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

*"I have fought the good fight,  
 I have finished the race,  
 I have kept the faith.  
 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,  
 which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day,  
 and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."*

So, even St. Paul, who knew there'd be a delay, didn't think it would last long—  
 certainly not as long as the Church has been waiting.  
 Waiting can be difficult, but the delay is for the sake of the unbelieving world.  
 His longsuffering is so that His Word would continue to go forth.  
 That people would continue to hear it and believe it.  
 That fewer and fewer would on the Last Day come into judgement  
 and that more and more would have eternal life.

Our sin of course is thinking, "Oh sure, He'll come, but not today."  
 Jesus teaches otherwise.

Our sin is thinking, "I'll have enough time."  
 Again, Jesus teaches otherwise.

Our sin is thinking, "I'll get in, even without the oil."  
 Jesus teaches otherwise.

As the girls sleep, a watchman hears and sees the approaching company off in the distance. The cry is made, "The bridegroom is here! Come out to meet him." The girls jump up. Hair is primped, things are gathered, and for those with extra oil, empty lamps are filled.

The foolish girls though—need oil, so they ask the others to share.

"There won't be enough for us if we give some to you."

Which is true!

If this request is granted,

there was the danger all would lack enough and be refused admission to the party. This is something the wise girls will not risk.

So, the foolish girls are told to go get their own.

Sharing is not an option.

While they're gone, the bridegroom arrives and the wise, with lamps burning—go in with him, and the door is shut.

Sometime later, the foolish girls return, (KNOCKING) "Lord, lord, open to us."

But the bridegroom answers—with some of the most frightful words in the Bible,

"Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."

With that, the parable ends. Jesus concludes,

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

It's tempting to wonder why the wise girls didn't share—

and tempting to wonder where the foolish girls are to get oil at such a late hour?

But keep in mind, this is a parable,

not meant to explain every little question we may have.

Here's what it does explain through: Our Lord Jesus is the Bridegroom, who has no doubt been greatly delayed—He's tarried.

The oil is all the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives in the 3rd article of the Creed.

God's Word, the Church, the Sacraments

and the faith that believes—that clings to all of these things.

This is what keeps the lamps burning while we wait.

And just as the ten fell asleep waiting,

it might be the case that the majority of us will do the same.

In that we sleep the sleep of death before the Bridegroom returns.

Yet, there's no guarantee of that? For we know neither the day nor the hour.

Therefore, our entire lives are to be lived in joyful expectation that the Bridegroom could come today. And when He does...

All the dead will be raised from their sleep.  
 All the living will be changed in a moment,  
     in the twinkling of an eye,  
         and all creation will stand before Him,  
             and for those gathered on His right,  
             they enter a new heavens and a new earth  
             wherein righteousness dwells,  
                 and we will sing with the angels and talk with the saints  
                 and rejoice in the presence of God and our Savior,  
                 Jesus Christ without end.

Beloved, He wants you there. Which is why He died for you.  
 So that all the punishment you deserve would be spent on Him.  
 This is why He rose from the dead for you.  
     To make a way for you out of the grave.  
     It's why He ascended to the Father's right hand  
         so that He could send the Holy Spirit to you,  
         to create faith in your heart and  
         He could stand day and night praying for you  
         without ceasing.

This is why Jesus baptized you,  
 to mark you as His own and give you all the gifts of salvation—  
 all the treasures of His kingdom.  
     This is why Jesus has His body and His blood on that altar for you—  
     where, what do you know—there's candles—telling you—here's where you  
     find more oil for your lanterns that run low.

Now, I realize some of you'd prefer to grouse about the new bulletin format,  
 or that the announcements have been moved to the beginning of the service.  
 Or discuss the weather...  
     But at the conclusion of this Church Year,  
         can I draw your attention,  
         just for a moment, to something infinitely more important?

Is your lamp burning?

I mean, when the Bridegroom finally appears and is no longer hidden,  
will you be able to trim your lamp  
and go in to the wedding banquet of heaven that He's prepared for you?  
Will you be ready to follow Him into the eternal marriage feast?  
Or, will you find yourself outside in eternal darkness?  
With the doors shut and no hope of entering in?

Church, the LORD has provided the oil—all the oil one would ever need!  
And for those who do not avail themselves of it,  
they are the biggest fools of all.

Yet for those who do avail themselves of the jugs of oil,  
the Day the Bridegroom returns will not be a Day of gloom and horror  
but rather a Day of great joy.  
A Day, not when you find the door shut,  
but rather the door to everlasting life flung open by Christ.  
...a Day you'll remember throughout all eternity.

Come quickly Lord Jesus, Amen.

***Standing...***

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.