

**Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – November 12, 2017**  
**Reverend Robert W. Marshall, Jr., Parochial Administrator**

Bombarded as we are by reality television, we might be forgiven for misinterpreting the setting of the parable contained in today's gospel. Ten virgins who took their lamps went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five of them wise. So far, it sounds like the premise of ABC's "The Bachelor," doesn't it? One lucky fellow – supposedly a prize catch – gives out roses each week to those women he is still interested in dating. He narrows it down to two and, eventually proposes to one of them – most of the time, that is. Sounds magical, doesn't it – true love, a lifetime of love, all found within the span of about 13 hours of prime time television. Of course, it almost never works out. So far, after 30 or 40 or 175 combined seasons of the Bachelor and the Bachelorette, only four of the couples actually got married. I guess it just goes to show you that not everyone can find the love of a lifetime on television – I guess that's what dating apps are for.

No, today's parable is not some first century Mediterranean version of "The Bachelor." It actually reflects the wedding ritual that was most commonly practiced in Jesus' time. When our parable begins, the marriage ceremony has already taken place – at the betrothal. After the ceremony, an extended period of family negotiations to settle financial matters followed. Only after these negotiations were concluded – probably a couple of months later – did the bridegroom come to her home to claim his bride. Escorted by the bridal party – in this case, the ten attending virgins, the bride moved to the home of her new bridegroom where all were welcomed into the wedding feast. So the virgins mentioned in our gospel today were not some hopeful brides – they were more akin to bridesmaids – with oil lamps instead of ugly dresses.

Nonetheless, the point of the parable – be wise, be prepared, for you know neither the day nor the hour – rings through regardless of our familiarity with the first century cultural traditions. And though these days more people would be familiar with an admonition to pack extra batteries or a warning to fully charge your electronic devices – the concept of bringing oil for an oil lamp is not so foreign that we cannot possibly understand it. If the financial negotiations went well, the bridegroom might come right away – before lighting the lamp is even necessary. If things dragged on, well, then you might need to add oil to your lamp before you could greet his arrival. Yes, you might get lucky – you might get by on a little bit of oil – but you cannot count on that. You might need that lamp burning for quite some time.

With our celebration this Sunday, we have only three more weeks in our liturgical year. Combined with our celebrations of All Saints and All Souls at the

beginning of the month, the Church naturally draws our attention in November to the end times, to the preparation all of us need to do to be ready for the second coming of Christ. We do not know the day or the hour of his return. Like the wise virgins, we must be ready to greet him when he comes in glory. But today's parable points us to more than just the end times. Its admonition to prepare for a late arrival is tremendous spiritual advice for all of us. All of us need to keep a sufficient amount of oil, of spiritual fuel, on hand.

You see, some of us come to Christ in a burst of enthusiasm – a moment of conversion, leaving sin behind and allowing the Spirit of the living God to enkindle a fire in our heart. Others of us grew up in the faith – we spent our early years learning about God and about his Church. In the years since, we can point to many moments when our faith was sustained, when it grew, when we repented of our sin and got back on track. For all of us – whether our faith was from a burst of energy or a lifetime of nurturing – for all of us the temptation is to coast, to rest on our laurels. I received a sufficient amount of spiritual fuel when I turned my life around – that will take me to the end. Or, I learned everything I ever need to know about God, about my faith, when I went to Catholic school or CCD or PRE – I don't need to grow in prayer, in faith, in wisdom and knowledge. The oil I have in my lamp of faith is enough to keep it burning. Well, maybe the second coming of Christ will be today or tomorrow or next week. Maybe the oil in your lamp of faith is enough. But maybe Christ will be delayed a little longer – so far it's been about 2000 years – maybe you will need a little more oil, maybe your faith will need a little more fuel if we hope to make it to the end. Indeed, with the challenges and difficulties that most of us face each day, I suspect that we need a little more oil just to keep our lamp burning until tomorrow. There are times when our flame doesn't need to be too high – but there are plenty of times when it seems like we have a real oil-burner on our hands. That's when we need to replenish our fuel – when we need to turn to God in daily prayer, when we need to avail ourselves of the sacraments, when we need to do a little spiritual reading. That's when we need our faith to grow or that flame will go out long before the bridegroom arrives. In reality television, one famous couple spent 17 million dollars on a wedding for a marriage that lasted 72 days. When I am meeting with engaged couples, I always ask them to spend less time worrying about the wedding and more time actually preparing for marriage. That same advice applies to us. May we spend less time concerning ourselves with the pleasures and distractions of the present and more time growing in faith, more time refilling our oil lamps, more time concentrating on eternal life.