

Thirty-second Sunday Per Annum (A)
November 12, 2017.

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour (Mt. 25:13).

The parable of the five wise and five foolish bridesmaids is an exhortation to vigilance or watchfulness. We are exhorted by Our Lord to be ever vigilant so as to be ready to meet Him when He comes for we know neither the time nor the hour when He will come. Although this is true of His second coming and even of the hour when He will call us to Himself in death, there is however, a time of His coming that we do know, and that is Our Lord's coming to us in grace; in the grace of the present moment, in the grace of the Sacraments that we receive and in the grace of prayer which helps us to live in the awareness of the holy presence of God. Because there is a correlation between prayer and life, our vigilance in prayer helps us to live soberly and with an attitude of gratitude as we experience the workings of grace in our lives. St. Peter exhorts us: *Be sober, be watchful. (1 Pt. 5:8).*

As we approach the end of the liturgical year the Sacred Liturgy invites us to ponder what we call the four last things: death, judgment, Heaven and hell. These are realities that help us to live soberly and vigilantly. Death is an inevitable reality. Everyone knows this, although not everyone knows what comes next. Nearly all religions, cultures and individuals in history have believed in some form of life after death. Our secular culture may be an exception to this but we believe *in the life of the world to come*. The Epistle to the Hebrews says: *Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (11:6)*. Most men *draw near to God*; most men have a religion; most men believe that He exists and that *He rewards those who seek Him*. Most men also know that justice distinguishes the good from the evil, and therefore, that after judgment there must be separate destinies for us; reward for good and punishment for evil. So we can safely say that there is a general belief in some form of heaven and hell. What the Church adds to this universal human wisdom – and this we could not discover without divine revelation – centers on Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Church gives a radically sharper focus to our instinctive but vague sense of justice by telling us about God, and specifically, Christ Our Lord. This applies not only to life as we live it but also to our final judgment. It is an encounter with Christ. Quoting the great Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: *At the evening of life we shall be judged on our love (1022)*. These are beautiful words; eloquent in their simplicity. Our love is a response to God's love, which was given to us in Christ (*1 Jn. 4:16*). Therefore the standard of our final judgment is Christ. Like life, judgment is Christocentric; that is to say that its point of reference is Christ. Again the *Catechism* explains: *In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth about man's relationship with God will be laid bare (1039)*.

In this final encounter, a judgment, *each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of Heaven – whether through a purification – [what we refer to as Purgatory] or immediately – or immediate and everlasting damnation (1022)*, hell. There are only two eternal destinies: Heaven or hell, union or disunion with God, the one and only ultimate source of all goodness and joy. Each one of us will be either with God or without Him forever. There is no reincarnation; no “second chance” after time is over. There is no annihilation, no end of the soul's existence. There is no change of species from human being to angel or to anything else.

We do well during this month dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory to think about our mortality and soberly assess our efforts to live in the holy presence of God. There is no “second chance” after death because there is no more time. Our life—time comes to an end. The time for repentance and salvation is *now*. St. Paul exhorts us: *Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor. 6:2). After death our soul is no longer in this material body and this material universe, which is the place where time resides. Death is a definitive “point of no return”. Again, Scripture says, *It is appointed for men to die once, and after death comes judgment* (Heb. 9:27). Purgatory exists because God is both just and merciful. Purgatory is *like a refiner’s fire* (Mal. 3:2). It refines and purifies those who at the moment of death are neither good enough for immediate Heaven nor bad enough for hell. The *Catechism* explains: *All those who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of Heaven* (1030).

Our good deeds and merits go before us; and these are the evidence of our friendship with God for we are called to be much more than servants. *No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you* (Jn. 15:15). The *all* that He has made known to us includes the truth about our ultimate destiny; life everlasting either in a state of union or disunion with God. Our ultimate happiness lies in self-surrender. This is the lesson we gladly learn in the loving embrace of a deep friendship. Here, in the loving embrace of Christ Our Saviour, Who calls us His friends, we help one another to surrender to the love of God in the communion of Saints; a communion that includes those who are radiant in the glory of Heaven, the Holy Souls in Purgatory, and us who feebly struggle but who nonetheless strive for that unfading crown of glory. This is our hope and *in this hope we [are] saved* (Rom. 8:24).