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Wisdom in the Life of Faith

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Wisdom in the Life of Faith

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Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for November 9, 2014 for Cycle A:

Wis 6:12-16; Ps 63; 1 Thes 4:13-18; Mt 25:1-13

WISDOM IN THE LIFE OF FAITH

Lawrence E. Frizzell

"Day by day the liturgy builds up those within the Church into the Lord's holy temple, into a spiritual dwelling for God, an enterprise which will continue until Christ's full stature is achieved" (Vatican II, *Liturgy* #2). Among the purposes of worship centered on the Paschal Mystery (the fulfillment of the divine plan in the death-and-resurrection of Jesus) is the spiritual enrichment of the faithful. Of course, each person must recognize that he or she belongs to the ecclesia (often rendered in English as "Church," the convocation of all called by the Father to become the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. As the communion of saints, this community includes all who have completed their earthly pilgrimage in faith. As the Church year comes to an end we remember the faithful departed; this is an occasion as well for consideration of our own preparation for death.

St. Paul addressed the first Christians in Thessalonica on the proper understanding of death. The Death-and-Resurrection of Jesus is the mystery into which we enter at baptism and therefore it is the pattern for our transition to eternal life. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thes 4:14). How do we bring our belief in Christ to fruition?

The Hebrews in ancient times learned the necessity of ordering all aspects of daily life to the sacred purpose of serving God. This could be accomplished only with the divine gift of wisdom, for which young King Solomon prayed when God suggested that he ask for something (1 Kgs 3:5). This wisdom became the object of reflection on the part of sage and prophet alike. Collections of such teachings were attributed to Solomon, who in his younger years was considered to be the sage par excellence.

The "Wisdom of Solomon" is a book written in Greek by a member of the Alexandrian Jewish community in Egypt. Scholars date it to a period late in the first century B.C. The selection for this Sunday teaches that wisdom (a feminine noun in both Hebrew and Greek) is offered by God even before we realize how much we need it. Those who rise early to pray will find this gift awaiting them. Anyone who keeps vigil for the sake of wisdom will be free from care. Attentive to the biblical patterns of prayer, the Jewish people become alert to the sustaining presence of God's gifts through all the trials of life.

Jesus used a parable to teach that, to be vigilant in fulfilling responsibilities, people must have foresight. The wise virgins brought a supply of oil so that their lamps could be refilled. The fact that they do not share their reserve with their negligent companions may disturb the idealistic listener. However, Jesus wanted to teach that adults should make personal decisions in life that build toward the future. Providing a "cushion" every time someone is about to fall may deprive

that person of a valuable lesson. No one else can prepare us for the necessity of using God's gifts in a mature manner. Being childlike (Mt 18:1-5) implies implicit trust in God's care throughout our lives. This openness to divine help must be accompanied by cooperation with God's gifts. Anything less is perhaps a sin of presumption.

The foolish virgins express faith in Jesus through their plea: "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" But the Divine Bridegroom does not recognize their voice. Jesus taught the same lesson in the Sermon on the Mount. "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21). The gift of wisdom and faith must be utilized to perform deeds of obedience to God's call, preparing for eternal communion, by living the Paschal Mystery, "walking in the newness of life" (Rom 6:4).