

November 8, 2020

St. Augustine/Crowley Center 11:30 a.m.

### **Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

What a difference a week makes! This time last Sunday, we were all scurrying around to find our winter coats and gloves, and even our brushes to wipe off that pesky “white stuff” that was blowing around, making it feel more like January than the first day of November. Today, and these last few days, the weather feels much more like early September. But, in spite of the warm temperatures and otherwise pleasant conditions, the leaves are falling, and Nature continues with all the other changes that make it very clear that we need to prepare for what will surely come soon---it’s predictable.

The changing of the Seasons, and the other natural signs around us, are predictable every year and to be expected. We may not always like what comes, but we know that Fall will turn into Winter (and all that comes with it)----it’s only a matter of time. So we need to be wise enough to get ready for it---to take the steps needed to be prepared. And if we don’t, well then----that would just be foolish.

It’s in that same spirit that the Church reminds us every year at this time to be wise enough to think about, plan for, and prepare ourselves for the eventualities of our own human lives. In our Liturgical Calendar, the month of November is dedicated to a special remembrance of those whom we lovingly refer to as “All the Faithful Departed”. Last Sunday’s special Solemnity of “All Saints” was to encourage us to rejoice with all those who have died and are already among the Communion of the Saints---the Church Triumphant in Heaven. Monday’s Feast of “All Souls”, and really each day this month, is to encourage us to pray for those in Purgatory---those who are being purged/cleansed “on their way” to their eternal Home in Heaven. I’m sure we have been mindful of all our departed loved ones in these days, as I am in particular of my dear mother who’s 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of passing into Eternal Life was just yesterday. May she, and all our faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.

It is in that context of remembrance of those who have gone before us, and preparing for that time in our own lives, that we, as people of Faith listen to today’s Scripture Readings. All the Readings urge us to “be vigilant”, “be alert”, “be awake”, and “be ready”.

The beautiful first Reading from the Book of Wisdom assures us that “Wisdom”, the virtue that is reflective of God Himself---and the virtue given a feminine “personality” ---is not just something to be obtained, but is a quality of life for us to become. Wisdom doesn’t “play hard to get” ---it’s not elusive; in fact, as we heard this morning, Wisdom takes the initiative and seeks after us. She, that is God, wants to help us, but we must be vigilant or we will miss the opportunity to become more like God.

In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, and all of us, not to grieve over those who have died because in the end, we will all be together. That’s not only a consolation God gives to us, but, as Paul tells us, we should “*console one another with these words.*”

And in today’s Gospel, as Jesus once more tries to help His disciples understand the Kingdom of Heaven, He tells the Parable about the Ten Bridesmaids/Virgins. Jesus’ point is that we all need to be prepared to meet the Bridegroom when He comes at the end of time. And to do so, we need to be wise and prudent enough to make the right choices so that there’s enough “oil” to keep our lamps burning brightly for whenever it is that He comes.

So, we not only need to make good choices in our lives, we also need to make wise choices.

Of course, like all Jesus’ Parables, we need to grasp the deeper meaning. The 10 Bridesmaids represent humanity; half of them were wise and came prepared with plenty of oil to keep their lamps burning brightly, no matter how long it would take before the Bridegroom arrived; the other half were foolish, and came unprepared. The “oil” represents our love for Jesus; it can also be seen as representing the good deeds and loving actions of our lives. So when the “foolish ones” asked the “wise ones” to give them some of their oil, it would be impossible to do so. That would be like me asking Deacon/Dr. Don to give me his medical knowledge; or like any one of us asking any of our loved ones in Heaven to give us the holiness they achieved thru their lifetime. The “oil” isn’t a commodity to be purchased, or a prize to be won; but it is freely given to those who seek after it. Similarly, the Bridegroom represents the Son of God when He comes at the end of the world, or at the end of our lives, whichever comes first. Thinking about our own death is not necessarily a very pleasant thought; and yet, the longer we live in this world (as I can tell you from my own experience), we realize that death is a fact of life.

During this month of special remembrance of the Faithful Departed, we are also urged to consider our own mortality. As Jesus tells us at the end of today's Gospel: *"stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour"*. Those words aren't meant for us to live in a constant state of fear or dread, laying awake at night wondering and worrying whether "tomorrow might be the day?" That's not what Jesus wants. But we DO need to realize that some day WILL be the day when God calls us Home. So, the question is: are we among the "wise bridesmaids" or the "foolish" ones?

It's in that light that we listen to today's Second Reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians: *"We do not want you to be unaware about those who have fallen asleep so that you may not grieve like those who have no hope...for we believe that Jesus, who died and rose, will bring with Him all those who have fallen asleep."* Those words should fill us with great hope and, as I mentioned earlier, with great consolation. The Christian people living in Thessalonika were struggling with the idea of their loved ones dying as martyrs, or even just dying of natural causes, because they had been convinced that Jesus would come in Glory for the Final Judgment before they would die. The fact that their loved ones were dying before that great Event became a "crisis of faith" for them. That's why Paul was trying to console them and he urged them: *"Do not grieve like those who have no hope."*

All of us, living in this incredibly challenging and stress-filled year of 2020, know a good bit about any number of "crises" that we've had to deal with, and some that are still to come.

The biggest has been, and continues to be, this worldwide Pandemic, and the death, destruction and fear caused by COVID-19. It's taken the lives of nearly 250,000 people in the U.S. and almost 1,250,00 people around the world; it's dramatically altered the quality of life of all of us, and caused us to live with a much clearer sense of our human vulnerability and mortality.

On top of that, we have been living through the greatest time of social unrest in our country since the 1960's, and perhaps even more than then. The Elections that were held this past week remain contested, though it appears as of yesterday that our country has a new President-Elect. We all pray for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, and we pray most especially for a peaceful transfer of power and, as Mr. Biden said last evening, that we would enter upon that Biblical "time to heal" that our nation so desperately needs.

And as if all of that wasn't enough, it appears that the long-awaited report from the Vatican on the scandalous life of former Cardinal McCarrick will be released early this week. And though I haven't seen it yet, I think we can all expect that this will be another embarrassment for the Church, and will again be a time of righteous anger among many of our Catholic people.

I mention all of that because I think that's exactly what St. Paul was helping us to recall. He didn't tell the Thessalonians "not to grieve". Of course they should be concerned, and they had every reason to mourn. No, he told them "*not to grieve like those who have no hope*". We are people of Faith---but also, because of Jesus' Resurrection, we are people of Hope.

These issues that we're currently dealing with in our country, and in our Church, do cause us to grieve; we mourn the divisions among us; we mourn the sin that infects even people of such high profile in the Church, and who knows how many other things that might be revealed in that report that will cause us grief. BUT, we grieve with HOPE. We grieve, but always returning to Jesus' mission in which He has called us to share. Our Faith isn't "pie in the sky" platitudes that if we have faith all will be well. No, Jesus is the primary example that is not the case. These are the moments when we need to re-focus on the meaning of our Faith in our Savior Who was unjustly accused, mercilessly tortured, and ignominiously crucified---and that was all completely transformed and defeated through His glorious Resurrection---a Victory in which we all share. THAT is our reason to Hope, even in the midst of the grief of what goes on around us, including the grief over our deceased loved ones---and our own death, whenever that may be.

This year has been filled with a confrontation with death and division like we haven't experienced before. THIS is when our Faith matters---to be able to see all that goes on around us here and now in light of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus which He accomplished for all time. Grieving is something all people will do. The question for us is: will we grieve "like those who have no hope", or will we see grief as a step in the process, not a conclusion. Death, both the "minor deaths" we experience in these various crises we've been dealing with, as well as the ultimate moment of death, is beyond our control. But how we face it is very much within our control.

Let us seek after that precious virtue of Wisdom, so that the "oil" of our lives will keep us burning brightly, and we will always be ready to meet the Lord

whenever and however He comes in our lives, or at the moment of our death. As St. Paul said: *“If we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God through Jesus, bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”* Let those words bring us consolation, and may we in turn, console one another.

God bless you, now and always.