

Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time: Where Are We Going to Be When the Music Stops?

There were ten virgins, five wise and five foolish. The wise virgins took advantage of the opportunity they had to serve the Master. The foolish ones squandered their time and did not get to enjoy the banquet of their Lord's love.

This parable demands a little explaining because it presumes a custom that we no longer follow. In the ancient times of the East, on the day of a wedding, the groom would go to the bride's house and confer with her father. He would sign the marriage covenant and then escort his bride back to his house, or his father's house. All of the bride's family would follow. When they finally got to the house, the wedding reception, to use our words, would begin. Then they would seat the priest next to nasty old Aunt Harriet. (Oh, sorry, that was another reception I was invited to.) The virgins were part of the ceremony, lighting the way for the newly weds. One semblance of this ancient wedding custom still remains. That is the custom of the father walking the bride down the aisle. The meaning is that the bride is going from her father's home to her husband's home.

The point of the parable is not about weddings, though. It is about being ready. Perhaps a better way to understand the Lord's point is if we consider playing musical chairs. You remember how to play musical chairs, right? You walk around the chairs, carefully situating your sit down over each chair, (Hey this is PG rated). You are waiting for the music to stop, hoping that you can get to a chair before a slower person. Consider Jesus telling a parable of children playing musical chairs, and then turning to you and to me and asking, "Where are you going to be when the music stops?"

Life here on earth comes to an end much sooner than any of us expect. This is certainly evident when we hear about the death of a young man or woman, like my dear friend Nathaniel Kuhlman who died three years ago on his honeymoon. He was 23 years old. It was a horrible shock. But even the deaths of our parents or grandparents well into their 80's or 90's are a shock to us as we try contemplate life without Mom or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa, no longer sitting in their chair on Thanksgiving Day, having a drink and celebrating their family.

The Gospel reading is telling us, make the best use of the time we have been given. We cannot be putting off to a more convenient time our opportunities to serve God. These opportunities may never arise again.

Some of these opportunities may seem quite minor, but actually they can have a tremendous positive effect upon others and upon our whole relationship with God.

Here's a little example I like to use with the young people who I prepare for marriage: Parents go to a movie with their thirteen year old who could easily pass for eleven. The sign at the ticket booth is quite clear: children under 12 \$10.69. Adults \$13.69. The parents reason that it is ridiculous to consider their child an adult, so they

ask for a child's ticket. "Everyone does this," they think. Fine, but they've just missed a great opportunity to instill honesty into their child. For a measly three bucks they could have conveyed to their child that honesty is more important than money. Perhaps, this lesson shown by their actions would have made a lasting impression upon their child. How many more opportunities do we have to impress important lessons upon our children? Life is short. We have only so many opportunities to serve God.

When we do that which we know within our hearts is the right, Christian way of acting, we are not just doing a good deed. We are serving God. His Presence in our lives transforms our actions to such an extent that the effects of our actions have infinite value. The results of these actions continue forever. No opportunity we have to serve God is too little to have a major effect upon our lives and the lives of his people.

But opportunities pass, and sometimes, they never appear again. Then the music stops.

We have so little time left and so much to do before this present phase of our lives comes to an end, before the Master comes to take us into his banquet. Today we ask God to help us refine our lives so we may make the best use of the time he gives us to bring His Presence to the world.