

Wisdom 6:12-16

The name of the writer of the Book of Wisdom is unknown but he was a member of the Jewish community in Alexandria, Egypt about 50 - 100 years before the birth of Christ. The purpose of his writing was to call his fellow Jews to holiness at a time when they were experiencing suffering and oppression at least in part from the hands of their fellow Jews who had fallen away from the practice of their faith. To counteract these ideas, the author studied the sacred writings to give hope and consolation to his contemporaries. His profound knowledge of the Old Testament is manifest in nearly every line. He writes in the person of Solomon to emphasize the value of what he says.⁸ Because this document was written in Greek, it is not included in either the Protestant or the Jewish canon of scripture.⁴

12Resplendent This refers to her divine origin.³ **and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her.** In this poem, the author is telling the Egyptian Jews that they did NOT need to envy the wisdom of the Greeks that prevailed at the time. In order to obtain Wisdom, they simply had to seek her. Wisdom is clearly A PERSONIFICATION OF GOD, who is not elusive and yet must be sought.¹

13She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire; Wisdom is not dependant on education, nor wealth, nor social standing. Unlike knowledge, which requires much hard labor to acquire, Wisdom is available to all who seek her and is eager to meet her pursuer more than half way.¹

14whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, While God is not mentioned specifically, dawn was a prime time for prayer among the Jews, so to “watch for Wisdom at dawn” suggests praying to God for wisdom.² This “watchfulness” is promised as the KEY to finding and understanding Wisdom. **for he shall find her sitting by his gate.**

15For taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence, Even to think of wisdom is a step in the right direction! and whoever for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care; Wisdom is that elusive attribute that enables us to see beyond the surface of things into their depths, to see as God sees, and therefore to see God. The vigilant bridesmaids of today’s gospel parable exemplify the wisdom described here. The sad fate of the bridesmaids who foolishly go to sleep on the job shows the consequence of failing to seek wisdom.¹

16because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude. Wisdom can be found only in the souls of God’s friends for we are told in chapter 1 (1:4) that “Into a soul that plots evil wisdom enters not, nor dwells she in a body under debt of sin.” The individual gifted with wisdom consistently makes wise decisions and provides godly insights for problems.

As we are approaching the end of the liturgical year with only two Sundays left until Advent, our attention turns to the end of the world as we know it and the fullness of God’s reign. This is probably the oldest text in the New Testament and the earlier the writing, the more dramatic the ideas about the imminent coming of the end of the world and about how this would take place.⁵

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The concern among the Thessalonians was that some of them had died before the coming of Christ in glory. They worried that those who had died would not share in that glorious triumph. Paul writes so that they will not grieve like those who have no hope.²

13We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. The expression “fallen asleep” was often used by the early Christians to refer to those who died in the faith of Christ. It is not just a euphemism: it underlines the fact that death is not the end.⁶ “so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.” This is not referring to a natural sorrow at the loss of a loved one but with a pagan sorrow that is without Christian hope. The object of this hope is specific: the resurrection and a life of glory with Christ.³

14For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. The resurrection that we will experience is not only similar to our Lord’s; his Resurrection is in fact the cause of ours.⁶ The Catechism tells us that not only the immortal soul will live on after death, but that even our “mortal body” will come to life again. (CCC 990) At the time of death the soul is separated from the body but it will be reunited with the body on the day of resurrection of the dead. (CCC 1005) ALL the dead will rise, “those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” (CCC 998)⁷

15Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, This does not mean that the Parousia will happen soon or that he will live to see the day. Paul uses the first person plural because at the time of writing both he and his readers were alive. However, his words were misinterpreted by some of the Thessalonians, and that was the reason he wrote the second epistle a few months later in which he puts things more clearly. **will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

16For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, This will happen on the last day at the end of the world. (CCC 1001)⁷ To describe the signs which will mark the Lord’s coming, Paul uses imagery typical of the great manifestations of Yahweh in the Old Testament: the command of the Lord, the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trumpet.⁶ and the dead in Christ will rise first. These are the ones who had died in the Lord and were already enjoying the vision of God in heaven. Obviously, they will not be under any disadvantage.⁶

17Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up This second group who are the ones who are still alive on that day, will be “caught up,” that is, changed by the power of God from being corruptible and mortal to being incorruptible and immortal.⁶ 1 Cor. 15:51-52 explains that “Not all of us shall fall asleep, but all of us are to be changed—in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet...This corruptible body must be clothed with incorruptibility, this mortal body with immortality.”⁸ **together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** The clouds were the traditional veil and accompaniment of God and of the Risen Christ.³ **Thus we shall always be with the Lord.** After the general judgment, which will take place that day, the righteous will be “always with the Lord.” That is in fact the reward of the blessed: to enjoy forever, in body and soul, the sight of God, thereby attaining a happiness which more than makes up for whatever they have had to do to obtain it for “the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom. 8:18).

18Therefore, console one another with these words. Paul says to console one another with the great hope and comfort of the promise of the resurrection when all of God’s children will stand united in the incredible presence of God in a glorious family reunion!

Matthew 25:1-13

After his final, futile encounter with the Scribes and Pharisees on the Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus left the temple sad and discouraged. In the company of his disciples he went out the Eastern Gate of Jerusalem and crossed the Kidron Valley to the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. There he sat down and faced the city upon which he had lavished graces but where they had still rejected him. Then he foretold the coming fate of Jerusalem, pointing out the signs of his final coming to judge the world and he repeated the warnings, among which we find this parable encouraging us to be ever vigilant and ready for his Second Coming.¹⁰

1 Jesus told his disciples this parable: “The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. In the Old Testament, God is called the bridegroom of Israel. In the New Testament, Jesus is the bridegroom. This story line centers on a Jewish marital custom: following the period of betrothal, the groom would lead a procession at night to bring his new wife to their home, and they would celebrate a week-long banquet with family and friends. Here the bridegroom arrives to begin the joyous procession and take his wife to the marriage feast.⁹

2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The ten represent all the faithful who are supposed to be preparing themselves for the final coming of Christ. The five foolish ones know that the Bridegroom is coming sometime but they neglect their personal, individual preparation.¹⁰

3 The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, While olive oil was the usual fuel for the lamp, olive oil is used today in the sacraments of baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick.

4 but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps.

5 Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. Awaiting the bridegroom signifies one's uncertain life-span as no one knows the hour of his death and judgment.⁹

6 At midnight, there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ The cry at midnight reminds us of the suddenness of the Parousia. Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Then the period of service and preparation will come to an abrupt close and there will be no time for anything except to go forth to meet the bridegroom who is also the Judge.

7 Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps.

8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ The lamp is Christian faith, while the oil represents good works or the practice of the Faith;⁹ another way of saying this is that the light of faith is kept alive with the oil of charity. Souls must prepare for their personal encounter with Christ the bridegroom by loving God and neighbor. People know what they must do to get ready for eternity but some put it off until it is too late.

9 But the wise ones replied, ‘No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.’

10 While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Those lacking good works will be shut out of heaven's banquet. From the sad fate of the five foolish virgins we learn that the possession of the true faith, that is the external membership in the Church with lip-service only in prayers and the worship of God are not enough to save our souls for there must be also be a real practice of the profession we make and the performance of acts of charity.¹⁰

11 Afterwards the other virgins came and said, ‘Lord, Lord, open the door for us!’ This is another reminder from Matthew that those who are open to the wisdom of God have ears to hear and accept Jesus' message willingly. Those who reject it find themselves rejected.¹

¹²But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' This last discourse recalls the first discourse of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom."

¹³Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour." The issue here may have been the delay in the Second Coming of Christ. The wise will not let their love grow dim; they will be ready whenever the Lord comes, even if the delay is unexpectedly long.²

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers" by Aelred Rosser, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (4) "Dictionary Of The Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (5) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Martin Connell, (6) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles," (7) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (8) "St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible" (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, and (10) "The Parables Of Christ" by Charles J. Callan, O.P.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.