

Wisdom 6:12-16

Psalm 63

Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

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The task of extracting meaning from today's readings might seem a little intimidating at first. Navigating the language and exploring the depths of these three readings takes some effort – not all that unusual with Scripture. But in reality, these readings can be boiled down to three fairly simple and straight-forward concepts – wisdom, hope, and being prepared.

Seven books of the Old Testament make up what we call the wisdom literature of the Bible. These books gather together and articulate the consequences of many varied human experiences in order to convey wisdom – to help us understand and deal with the problems of life, especially sickness, suffering, disaster, and death. Our first reading today is taken from The Book of Wisdom, one of those seven wisdom literature books. In this reading, wisdom is portrayed as a patient and gracious woman who longs to guide us through life and lead us intimately to God. It is a fitting prelude to the Gospel parable about the foolish and wise bridesmaids.

But before turning to the Gospel, let us consider for a moment the second reading taken from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. This reading is about hope. As Christians, the source of our hope is in the Resurrection of Jesus, the salvation that he offers to all, and the expectation that he will come again. Before Jesus, people had no such hope. Their grief at times of death was devastating because they perceived nothing beyond their earthly existence. Death was the end for them. But the people of Thessalonica, to whom Paul wrote this letter, believed in the Resurrection and in the Second Coming of Christ. They had hope. They were afraid,

however, that some would be left out. Their fear was for those who had already died, as well as for themselves, in case they also died before the return of Christ. In his letter, Paul is assuring the Thessalonians, and us, that Christ will come again, and when he comes, he will embrace us all – the living as well as the dead. Paul's message is one of comfort, consolation, and abiding hope for all of us!

God offers salvation to all, but we must be prepared to accept God's gift of salvation, and that is the message of our Gospel today. As we approach the close of this Liturgical Year, this is the first of three Gospel readings that we will hear dealing with the end of time. In these Gospel readings, Jesus is responding to questions from his disciples, "What will it be like in the end?" and, "When will it happen?" None of us knows "the day nor the hour," as Jesus said, but God wants us to be prepared – not so much for fear of being locked out like the foolish bridesmaids, but for the satisfaction of knowing that we are ready to accept God's gracious gift. We all know that sickening feeling in the pits of our stomachs when we approach events in our lives for which we are unprepared. For many of us, the most common of these events are, or were, school exams. I have walked into more classrooms than I care to remember knowing that we would be given an exam for which I had not studied. It is not a good feeling. Thank God, I am now at a point in my life that I don't have to worry much about exams, unless you count the driver tests that I may be taking in a few years to keep my driver's license. Exams aside, we all continue to face events throughout our lives for which we must be prepared. Each year, as April 15 approaches, we must be prepared to file our income tax returns, or at least to file for an extension. And, I have to prepare each time I am scheduled to give a homily at Mass. I shudder to think about walking out here unprepared – and you

wouldn't like it either. Then, there is the ultimate event for which we must all be prepared – the final judgement. We know that our God is merciful, compassionate, and forgiving. But God wants us prepared to face our final judgement and to accept God's gift of eternal life. And we want to be prepared as well. So how do we prepare? Jesus answers that question very clearly in the Gospel that we will hear in two weeks, on the last Sunday of this Liturgical Year, Christ the King Sunday. In that Gospel reading, Jesus foretells the final judgement and says those who are prepared will have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited the imprisoned. "Whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me." Jesus says. "Come.... Inherit the kingdom."