

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2023 A

**“They all became drowsy and fell asleep.”** What a great way to start a homily! I am reminded of a gentleman who once told me something preachers seldom hear: that my homilies are too short. When I asked him to tell me more, he said: “Well, Father, I work all week in town and then on the farm. This is the only chance I have to sit down for a nap all week, and then you have us up for the Creed so soon I can barely get my forty winks.” So relax if you can, but I’ll try to be brief.

It's easy to get lost in the details of the story of the sleepy bridal party – why ten? What does the oil mean? Why did the wise ones refuse to share? But parables are intended to make a single, basic point. **Here it is about being prepared to meet Jesus, the Bridegroom, even though it takes time.** In a world of 24/7 news, same day delivery, ever-faster Internet, and accelerating change, can we wait for God?

This waiting makes us weary sometimes. It happened to Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane. On that first Holy Thursday, Jesus asks them to “Remain here, and keep watch with Me.” But from confusion and anxiety and just human weariness after a good Passover meal, they fall asleep. For us, too, heavy eyelids and sleepy hearts might come from the busyness and sufferings of life; or headlines about war and tragedy and divisions; or the unsettling disorientation that comes from the shifting ground of moral values increasingly disconnected from faith; or just the dullness of spirit that arises from routine. In our human weakness, we all become drowsy disciples now and then.

Some centuries ago, the scene of the Last Judgment was popular in religious art. Michelangelo’s famous fresco in the Sistine Chapel in Rome is just one of many such works. It was often placed on the inside wall of churches above the doorway as people left Mass to go out into the world. It was not meant as a fearful warning to watch your step, as much as a **promise and a reassurance**. The Bridegroom returns at the end of history as the Just Judge, and that reality naturally sobers us when we think about our own

failures, where we too have fallen asleep while waiting. But fundamentally, this is a message of **hope**. All the suffering, the evil, the tragic injustice, the betrayals of trust and charity, the loss of what is good and true and holy – *all of this will have a resolution in God's love and mercy*. We know well that we cannot bring about the peace and healing our hearts long for; but God will. It is for the righting of all wrongs that we wait; and as the prayers of Mass remind us, we wait in joyful hope. That joy we cannot control, but we can enter into it by every act of kindness and goodness inspired by God. And that hope allows us to keep vigil even when it seems like everyone has drifted off and we feel alone.

Just as surely as the Bridegroom comes to us in the Eucharist, so will He come, to ALL of us at the end of time, and to EACH of us, as Paul says, when we fall asleep in death. *We won't always be awake, but we can always be ready to be awakened, and welcomed to the Supper of the Lamb, as the Book of Revelation calls the Wedding Feast of Heaven*. This week, when your alarm goes off, ask the Holy Spirit to help you be ready to meet Jesus in the people you encounter and the opportunities to serve they will bring. Precisely in the darkness and drowsiness, the call is there: "Behold, the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!" May that call find us patiently waiting, and ready to enter into joy.