Lectio Divina – 32nd Sunday of the Year A

Matthew's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Author is anonymous, but named as 'Matthew the tax collector' by later tradition.
- Written in scholarly 'synagogue' Greek.
- Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
- Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: "When Jesus had finished….":
    1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
    2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
    3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
    4. 3rd: 13 Parable Discourse
    5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
    6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
- May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
- Jesus first words are 'to fulfil all righteousness'.
- A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
- 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
- The only Gospel to explicitly mention the 'Church' – Matthew is theologian of the church.
- Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
- Names Jesus as 'Messiah' at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 25:1-13 - things to notice

- We have skipped ahead two chapters in our Gospel readings from Matthew.
- Remember that we are in the Apocalyptic Judgement discourse, so there are undercurrents of urgency and vague dire consequences in these readings. We are also approaching the end of the Liturgical Year (in a fortnight), so the readings at this end-time of the year have an end-time character.
- Themes of being prepared, keeping watch, staying awake, being ready and vigilant dominate the parables in Chapters 24 & 25 before the passion narrative begins in Chapter 26.
- The common theme of the Christian scriptures is: how do we live in the 'in-between times' – the time between the first coming of Jesus and his final coming?
- That seems to be the question being address in this section of Matthew's Gospel.
- Mark, Matthew and Luke use 'twinning' stories in their Gospels – what happens to men also happens to women; what happens to high-born people also happens to poor people; what happens to the righteous also happens to the sinners; what happens to old people also happens to young people. This is often seen in the miracle stories and in the parables.
- The parable about the ten virgins is a twin of the parable about the faithful and unfaithful male servants which occurs immediately before in Matthew's Gospel (24:45-51).
- It is important not to get too hung up on the details that we miss the point of this story. We don't, for example, know very much about the wedding rituals described in this parable.
- The story begins with: The (coming of) kingdom of heaven will be like this.
- Ten bridesmaids set out to meet the bridegroom. All have lamps. Five are wise (they made the best preparation they could for their role of welcoming the Bridegroom, taking not only lamps but extra oil as well) and five are foolish (they didn't prepare very well for their task, taking lamps but no extra oil).
- The bridesmaids probably represent the disciples (the community of believers) – some of whom prepares well to welcome Jesus when he comes for the great wedding feast), and some are foolish – not very well prepared.
- The bridegroom is late, the ten bridesmaids grow tired and fall asleep. Notice that the foolish ones don't use the delay in order to go and buy more oil – that is, to prepare better

for the arrival of the bridegroom. They are doubly foolish (failing to prepare properly in the first place, then failing to use the delay to prepare properly).

- At midnight they are called with a 'cry': The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him. Perhaps symbolic of the great eschatological cry of the Church which we will hear in Advent: Come, Lord Jesus. (Midnight: the dead of night, the unexpected hour, etc).
- They wake up and begin to get ready to welcome the Bridegroom, but the foolish ones discover that their lamps are beginning to go out. They have waited so long that the light (of faith?) is dimming and their lamps (hearts/love?) are growing cold.
- 'Give us some of your oil…', but faith and love (and the good works which come from them) are not things you can just *give* to another person. Faith and love grow out of a living relationship with God which is seen in good works.
- The bridegroom arrives and those who are ready go into the wedding feast with him. The door is closed.
- The others arrive and plead for admittance. Notice the double: Lord, Lord. But knowing the name of Jesus is not enough for admission to the feast. A living relationship of faith and love, in which master and disciple are known to each other, is necessary. The bridegroom says, 'I do not know you.'
- The punch line: So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

The first reading this Sunday is from the Book of Wisdom. Only the Catholic and Orthodox Churches include Wisdom in their Canon of Sacred Scripture. It is not included in the Jewish or Protestant canons. The book's full title is: The Wisdom of Jesus (Yeshua) son of (ben) Eleazar ben Sira. The name 'Sirach' for this book comes from the Greek translation of this book.

The reading praises Wisdom, personified as a woman. The book of Wisdom sees wisdom as residing firstly with God, being spoken by God, present when God created everything and also residing among the people of God (Israel).

Perhaps the first line: "Wisdom is bright and does not grow dim", is especially appropriate in the light of the lamps in the Gospel. Christian theology associates Wisdom as a gift of the Spirit, bringing real understanding of God's purpose and will.

Notice the intentional play between wisdom in the first reading and wise/unwise in the Gospel.

Reflection

Wisdom is at the heart of the first reading and Gospel. In the Bible, wisdom is not separate from God but a feminine personification of various attributes of God. The first reading presents wisdom as like a light which never fails. God is always taking the initiative with us, searching out the believers and revealing himself to them.

The parable in the Gospel continues the theme of wisdom. The ten virgins (representing the disciples) are waiting for the coming of the bridegroom (the return of Christ). The wise ones brought both their lamps and extra oil. The unwise ones brought only their lamps.

While they are waiting the lamps of the unwise begin to go out (their faith and love has grown cold, their good works are fading). The wise virgins cannot lend their faith, love and good deeds (the oil) to the others. Each disciple has to take personal responsibility for their faith and their salvation. The wise disciple, whose love, faith and good works do not grow dim, is recognised by the Lord and gains their place in the Kingdom of God. The disciple needs to remain alert, vigilant and prepared for the 'day of salvation' by continually growing in a faithful and loving relationship with God which produces its fruit in good works. That is, being hearers and doers of the Word.