

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This past Sunday the Church celebrated All Saints Day and last Monday, All Souls Day. As I mentioned in my column last Sunday, it was very edifying to see how many parishioners submitted names of their beloved dead to be remembered and prayed for in a special way this Month of November. In reading the many names brought to us for prayer, I have come to know you, our parishioners, in a new way. It was interesting that the prayer requests reflected the diverse ages, cultures, and backgrounds of our parish family. Several requests came from young families and individuals. I also realized that this is an intensely personal experience, reflecting on those who have died and their meaning in our lives. This reality makes our offering prayers together all the more powerful and significant. There is also a tacit recognition of the power of prayer and how this spiritual gift can help us to grow in faith and deepen our relationship with the Lord. Prayer also binds us with those who have died and our remembrance of them can be a source of great consolation and peace us.

St. Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians expresses the great gift of faith that God has given to the entire Christian community through the grace of Baptism. In Baptism we are restored to eternal life, and thus with confidence we intone the words, "For your faithful, O Lord, life is not ended. It is simply changed." St. Paul writes, "We 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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep." This call to Christian hope can be tested when loved ones or close friends die; this is also the case when people die tragically or at a young age. Such a loss conjures what can seem an inescapable grief. This is a very natural and appropriate response to death. We cannot deny this experience; yet, by faith we transform that grief, even over a period of time, into hope and consolation that God has kept his contract of eternal life.

As the Season of Advent beckons and will be upon us in a few short weeks, the Gospel today continues the motif or theme of being alert and attentive. Two weeks ago, the Gospel had Jesus using the metaphor of the servants waiting for the return of the master or bridegroom from the wedding feast. Today's Gospel of St. Matthew reflects another metaphor connoting watchfulness. This is part of what is known as the eschatological discourse. Eschatology refers to the "end times" or the final stages of human history. Thus, Jesus is preparing his followers for this time. The point is to live a life of virtue, service, and justice and so be disposed to share fully in God's glory.

In the early Church, there was great preoccupation with this sense that "the end times" were at hand, that feeling of an imminent end. Here we are over two thousand years later. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides this insight on eschatology as a part of our theology of salvation history. "Finally, the Church has an eschatological significance. To enter into the house of God, we must cross a *threshold*, which symbolizes passing from the world wounded by sin to the world of the new Life to which all men are called. The visible church is a symbol of the Father's house toward which the People of God is journeying and where the Father 'will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' Also for this reason, the Church is the house of *all* God's children, open and welcoming." [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1186].

A not uncommon occurrence these days is to see commercials touting preparedness materials for a natural disaster or other calamity. People build survival bunkers or shelters beneath their homes; they store up water, dry food staples, and other essentials necessary to survive such crises. Those who are prepared will be able to weather the storm, so to speak. Those who fail to prepare for that unexpected crisis will have their difficulties compounded. This makes sense to us. Jesus uses the imagery of the ten virgins to help us grasp the need for spiritual preparedness for when he returns to us in glory. The virgins are invited - this is important to note - to welcome the bridegroom. As with the twelve apostles, among all those who could have been chosen, only a few are selected. These virgins have been given a place of honor - to greet the bridegroom before the great wedding feast. Some take their mission seriously and bring oil with which to light their lamps at the appointed time; others do not. Those who did not come prepared wanted the responsible persons to give them oil. Rebuked, they go off to the merchant to procure oil. Meanwhile, the bridegroom returns and those virgins prepared are welcomed to the banquet. Those who were not prepared nor responsible still desire to enter the feast, pleading "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" He replied, "Amen, I say to you, I do not know you." The Gospel concludes, "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The Lord invites each of us to share in the banquet he has prepared for us. May we take seriously this privileged mission entrusted to our care. May we continue to take time to pray, to avail ourselves of the great sacraments of the Church, exercise works of mercy and charity, and so have the "oil", God's grace and Spirit, to light our lamps when God comes to greet us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who participated in the Holy Hour and Rosary which we celebrated as part of our observation of Priesthood Sunday on October 25. We had over 300 people join us for prayer via Facebook and YouTube. We also had several parishioners and friends present in the church.

Also, I want to express my sincere thanks to all of you who reached out to express your condolences upon hearing that my friend Father Robert T. Walsh, S.J. passed away on Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. Father Robert was a mentor and friend and I felt very privileged and blessed to know him over many years, beginning when I was a Jesuit seminarian at Bellarmine College Prep. He was a man of prayer, conviction and integrity. He was truly a companion of Jesus whose life of selfless service to others prepared him for the Lord's return. Well done, good and faithful servant! AMDG

Fr. Tom