

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

The life of the Christian is one that is built upon a foundation of repetition, and for good reason. As we look forward to the new year, as we begin the season of Advent, we will begin with what we have done time and time again. We will do so not because it is fun, but because it is good. We will do the same thing we have done the last year, and the year before, and the year before that, again and again and again, as the Church Catholic has done since she was born out of the side of our Lord. Not because it is fun, but because it is good; so we might be prepared, no matter when Christ returns. And so we wait. We are stuck here on this side of eternity, waiting for the coming of our bridegroom.

And like the virgins in our text, we are called to be ready at any time for his arrival. For we do not know how long it will be, so we must prepare. We must prepare for however long it is that our Lord takes to return. And the truth of the matter is that many will wait and think that they are prepared, but they are not. Many will say to themselves, I have enough. I am prepared for Christ's return, whenever it may be. But when the day comes, like a thief in the night, they will be caught unawares. And it is no one's fault but their own. For many, they neglect the one thing that is truly needed: to be prepared. They neglect their faith. They neglect their faith. gift from God, the oil in the parable. You see, some actual Christians are the foolish virgins in the parable. It's easy to look at this and say, "Well, those foolish virgins are not me. They're not the church". But they have faith. They have the Holy Spirit burning when they go. This is not a text about the sheep and the goats. It is a text about the separation of faithful Christians from those who only presume upon God's mercy.

It's easy to read these texts about the end times and think that cannot be me. I can't be like them because I'm here in church. But the foolish virgins are indeed faithful. at least for a time. They are looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom. They know who he is, and they eagerly, with anticipation, await his return. So do not be so confident that this is not you, that this could never happen to you. You must be on guard, and you must discipline yourself. The time of preparation is now. before the bridegroom comes. Take stock of your life and your faith, consider the oil in your lamps, and prepare for the long night ahead now, lest you fall asleep and are found wanting on that

last day. And so that we might be prepared so that this might not happen to us, we observe what the Church has always done. We begin again and again and again to hear the word of the Lord, to hear of his incarnation, to hear of his life, to hear of his return, and to be molded and shaped by it.

For this reason, we observe the church year. We begin next week in the observation of Advent to prepare ourselves to mortify our flesh and remind ourselves that the bridegroom has already come once in mercy. And that when he returns on the last day like a thief in the night, those without faith, those who have given themselves over to the ways of the world, to gluttony, lust, worldliness, those prioritizing the ways of the world, living according to worldly standards, those who seek peace, and only listen to preaching and teaching that is pleasant and easy upon the ears, rather than sound doctrine that calls us to repentance and directs us to Christ, those we find be found wanting.

There is a danger to us, a danger in becoming complacent, secure in what we have, rather than continually tending to and preparing for Christ's return. And if there is one thing that is clear from our gospel, it is that you must be prepared when the bridegroom comes. Lest you find yourself in the outer darkness, knocking upon the door. And he says to you, depart from me, I never knew you.

You must be prepared when Christ our Lord returns. And you cannot do it for someone else. You cannot count on someone else to do it for you. You cannot believe for someone else. At the coming of our Lord on the last day, you will be called, you yourself will be called to give an account for what you have done and confessed.

Each and every one of us is responsible for keeping watch, for tending to that which is given to us. You cannot watch and tend for another, but you can do great harm to another's faith. You should do all that you can to help and support your brother and sister in the faith. Do it now. Prepare now. if you wait until that last day to prepare, if you live each day and night saying, tomorrow I will begin, tomorrow I will not give in to sin, tomorrow I will begin to set aside the way of the world, my sinful flesh, tomorrow I will forgive. Be warned that tomorrow may never come. You will find yourself outside the banquet hall in the outer darkness, begging your Lord to open the door to you. Your very soul is at stake. Your very eternal life is at stake. So you must repent now. You must hold to the faith that has

been given to you now. You must hold fast to Christ. And follow his commandments now. For tomorrow may not come. We cannot simply put our faith, put our eternal salvation at risk because we are not ready. Because we are not willing to repent. We are not willing to do the hard work of examining our lives and turning away from sin.

We must be prepared when the bridegroom comes. It is a serious thing. But at the same time, it is the easiest thing in the world. Notice, none of the wise were at all concerned. None of the wise were at all worried. Because they know what they have. And they know what they have is Christ and his Holy Spirit given to them in the waters of their holy baptism. They know that what they have is an undying and unfading promise of eternal life that prepares them for the night. There is no fear that their lamps will run out. There is no fear. They have been prepared. Look to Christ. Look to Christ. the author and perfecter of your faith. Trust your baptism. The works of Christ, what he has done, has indeed prepared you. He has given you all that you need to last through the night. He has prepared you for the coming of our Lord. And so it is not a fearful thing, but a joyful affair. We just sang it in one of the most beautiful hymns of the church. Wake, awake, for night is flying. There is no fear. There's only joy. The watchmen are crying, Christ is here. Let us rejoice. For our King is returning to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. To give to his bride, the church, life forever. to give her all that he has in perfect splendor and joy and holiness for all eternity.

✠ In Jesus' name, Amen. ✠