32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Wisdom 6:12-16 / Matthew 25:1-13)
08.11.2026
Remembrance Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are all familiar with the parable of the 10 bridesmaids who wait with their lamps for the bridegroom to arrive at the wedding feast. The bridegroom represents Christ Jesus who will come again at the end of time. Five bridesmaids were wise and had brought oil with them for their lamps, while the other five were foolish and had brought their lamps without the oil required. The wise bridesmaids who had brought oil with them entered the wedding hall with the bridegroom and the door was closed. The foolish ones who had gone to buy oil at the last minute arrived too late. "Lord, Lord, they said, open the door for us. But he replied: I tell you solemnly, I do not know you". **What is this oil** which seems so necessary if we are to enter into the wedding hall, the kingdom of heaven? There are many possible answers to that question.

Following the Second Vatican Council and its liturgical reform, those responsible for shaping our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations decided that the first reading from the Old Testament should be chosen in such a way as to help us to understand the gospel passage of the day. In today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we hear Wisdom extolled. We heard these words: "Wisdom anticipates those who **desire** her, she makes herself known to them". Those who desire Wisdom! We know that Jesus is the Wisdom of God and we await his coming into our daily lives and at the end of time. I would therefore like to identify the oil for the lamps of the wise bridesmaids with their desire for God. Their hearts were filled with longing for the Lord. And so when the bridegroom arrived, they were ready to enter into the wedding hall, the kingdom of heaven, without difficulty.

Our vocation as Christians consists in searching for God, in seeking God. There is certainly no shortage of books written on this subject. Searching for God is the vocation of all those who have been baptised in Christ. As we search for Him and wait for his coming, Jesus invites us to stay awake, because we have a tendency to fall asleep. The oil we need in order to stay awake is a constant desire for Christ. We must keep that desire alive, always burning so that, when the Lord comes, we may be ready to welcome Him and follow Him.

So, the question we have to ask ourselves is: Am I awake? Am I searching for God? Or am I asleep, void of any desire? To be a Christian is to desire God, to desire to listen to Him and to do his will until the day when we are given to see him face to face.

We are all driven by desires. But what is it that we desire? Is it to acquire more in order to possess more; to have things that are bigger, more beautiful, or even more luxurious than those we already have? Is our desire is to be centre stage, to be greeted by everyone in the market square? Is it to be in control? Is it to climb the career ladder? Is it to be perfect? Or is our desire to seek God, to listen to Him, to do his will so that one day we may see Him? Is our desire to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength and to love our neighbour? Or is it simply to love ourselves and our own petty ideologies?

What is difficult in Christian life is not so much seeking the Lord and desiring Him, as persevering in that search and in that desire. What is difficult is not so much repenting, changing and being converted, as persevering in our commitment to conversion. **To begin is easy; to persevere is more difficult.** As time goes by, we run the risk of growing drowsy and falling asleep. We are called to keep walking, to keep searching for the Lord, and to keep returning to Him in a continual process of conversion. We must rise again and again whenever we fall, knowing that very often we fall into the same old traps. We need to remain vigilant. We need to keep ourselves on track, continuing our journey without losing heart.

We need to keep our lamps lit, to keep them burning so that we may remain vigilant and keep our desire alive. The psalmist sings: "Lord, your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path". If we want to keep on walking on the path of life until the end, we must remain faithful **to our daily reading of the Scriptures**, to the words of the Bridegroom who desires to live with us and with whom we desire to live. Let us listen to him and respond to him. This is the way to keep our lamp lit. We have to remain vigilant so as not to loose heart, so as not to miss an opportunity to meet the Lord. When we miss such opportunities, we gradually run the risk of faltering and giving up our journey on the path of life. We may even lose our way and wander down other, less fruitful paths.

The word "bridesmaid" can also be translated by "virgin". The figures of the Virgins and the Bridegroom evoke a sense of intimacy which the Lord himself wishes to share with us. Our vigilance must be as strong as the desire of a lover. Then we shall be able to walk with him the path of life, to listen to him and speak to him, to keep his word in our hearts and put it into practice each day of our lives.

Here in Northern Ireland, the Lord invites us to build up confidence and trust with our Christian brothers and sisters from other denominations, and also with those who hold different political views. This is the path we are called to follow. Taking the first step is not always as difficult as we might think. What is more difficult is persevering, refusing to become disheartened, even when we encounter misunderstanding and incomprehension. We must keep alive in our hearts the dream of peace, of communion, and of togetherness.

Like the wise bridesmaids, may our desire for the Lord be the oil that keeps us awake with our lamps burning brightly, always ready to welcome the Lord, and always ready to welcome our neighbour through whom the Lord comes to us!