

The Eschatological (or Olivet) Discourse, Part 2

Matthew Chapter 25

The Parable of the Ten Virgins. ¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, ⁴but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶At midnight, there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ⁷Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise ones replied, ‘No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. ¹¹Afterwards the other virgins came and said, ‘Lord, Lord, open the door for us!’ ¹²But he said in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Literary Context

Remember that we are in the middle of Jesus’ teaching about the end and the final judgment. The wedding feast represents in both the Old and New Testaments the celebration of the marriage (uniting) of God and his people. So it is obvious that the wedding is the Parousia, the bridegroom is the Messiah, and the virgins represent those invited to the wedding: the Church. The wise virgins are those Christians whose lives show they are prepared for the return of Christ. The foolish virgins are those who are not. The parable revolves around the supposed “delay” of the bridegroom.

What is the difference between the two groups of virgins when we are told that both fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom? When the bridegroom comes, one has oil to keep lit their lamps, the other does not. So what is the oil? Every commentary I consulted, both Catholic and Protestant, identify the oil as good works. Although this includes performing occasional acts of charity (remember that the word ἀγάπη (agape) was formerly translated “charity” in English) the theme of delay implies what we might call a “lifestyle” of charity. In other words, to be included in the kingdom one must live a kingdom life, which is the life of Christ.

Jesus didn’t devote one day a week to being the Messiah and fill the rest of his time with the cares of the world. Jesus embodied the life of the Messiah. It is abundantly clear that being a disciple of Christ involves much more than intellectual assent. It requires much more than verbally invoking the “name” of Jesus. It requires living the life and acting out the ministry of Christ in the world. We are to “take up [our] cross daily” (Lk. 9:23) and love as he loves (Jn. 13:34-35). So in this sense staying “awake” requires a way of life that is dedicated to Christ and his mission of healing and redemption.

A story of St. Francis, probably apocryphal, tells of the Saint hoeing his garden one day when he was asked by a passer-by “What would you do if you knew this was the last

day of your earthy life?” St. Francis is said to have replied, “I would finish hoeing my garden.”

What of the delay? Is Jesus really delayed? Let us again turn to St. Peter,

Know this first of all, that in the last days scoffers will come [to] scoff, living according to their own desires and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming?” From the time when our ancestors fell asleep, everything has remained as it was from the beginning of creation.” They deliberately ignore the fact that the heavens existed of old and earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God; through these the world that then existed was destroyed, deluged with water. The present heavens and earth have been reserved by the same word for fire, kept for the day of judgment and of destruction of the godless.

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard “delay,” but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out. (2 Pet. 3:3-10)

The Parable of the Talents. ¹⁴ “It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one—to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately ¹⁶ the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. ¹⁷ Likewise, the one who received two made another two. ¹⁸ But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ ²² [Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; ²⁵ so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.’ ²⁶ His master said to him in reply, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? ²⁸ Now

then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.²⁹ For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.³⁰ And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

Literary Context

Continuing the theme of the previous two parables (the faithful and unfaithful servant 24:42–51 and the wise and foolish virgins 25:1–13) Jesus draws a distinction between those who will enter the kingdom and those who will not. Upping the ante, so to speak, Jesus here teaches that our life in Christ involves even more than a life of constant charity, our efforts must return a “profit.”

It is tempting to allegorize the talents with some aspect of our character or life that we are gifted by God, but to do so limits the intention of this warning. It's not just our physical property, or our spiritual gifts, or our natural abilities (talents) that we must invest in the world, it is all of those things and more, if there is more.

Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good...Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked--the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours."¹

I think it is important to note the difference in the size of the talents. When I was preparing for confirmation as a Catholic Fr. Rocco Cuomo of Lakehurst, N.J. told me that God gives each of us a glass. We don't all have the same size glass; some may have a pint pot and some may have a shot glass. We are not be concerned with the size of others' glass but with filling our own.

It is so in this parable. Jesus knows we do not all have the “talents” for evangelization others may have, but we are nevertheless to use whatever talents we do have for the common good and the building of the kingdom. This means that some may be engaged in full time evangelizing while others devote their lives to raising a Christian family. Jesus does not see one as greater than the other.

“If a man does his best, what else is there?” Gen. George Patton

What about the question of private property? One of the reasons the wicked servant failed to invest his talent was, as he said, he expected the master to reap where he did

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper One, 2009), 196.

not sow. In other words, what would be the good of increasing the wealth with which he was entrusted if the proceeds would be taken away by the master? In answering this question, and considering the issues of wealth and private property, we might heed this observation by Pope Francis,

120. Once more, I would like to echo a statement of Saint John Paul II whose forcefulness has perhaps been insufficiently recognized: “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone”. For my part, I would observe that “the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property”. The principle of the common use of created goods is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order”; it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others. All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property or any other type of property, should – in the words of Saint Paul VI – “in no way hinder [this right], but should actively facilitate its implementation”. The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. This has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society. Yet it often happens that secondary rights displace primary and overriding rights, in practice making them irrelevant.²

The Judgment of the Nations. ³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, ³² and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for

² Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on the Fraternity and Social Friendship,” October 3, 2020,

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' ⁴⁴ Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' ⁴⁵ He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Literary Context

This section ought not really require much explanation. The questions here are who are the "sheep and the goats," and who are the "least of these?" Do the sheep and goats represent all people or only Christians? And likewise are those identified in need of mercy only Christians or all people in need? I think the answer lies in the book of Genesis, "When God created human beings, he made them in the likeness of God; he created them male and female. When they were created, he blessed them and named them humankind." (Gen. 5:1-2)

Please read the article at this link. [Jesus in His Most Distressing Disguise - Word on Fire](#)