

Most of the time when someone preaches on the parable of the 5 wise virgins and the 5 foolish virgins the theme that we concentrate on is being prepared for our final judgment, either at the end of the world, or at our death. I'm going to break the mold a bit this year and use this Gospel reading as a starting point to talk about vocations.

The Bridegroom is Jesus; the wedding feast is the kingdom of heaven. Sorry all my fellow manly men, we, the baptized, are the Bridesmaids. The lamp is our faith and the oil represents our good works.

Our inner consciousness, our awareness and belief in Jesus, the paschal mystery, all of the teachings of the magisterium, our faith is just the first step on the path to salvation. There are plenty of people who commit crimes, ignore God's law, who are just plain rude and obnoxious to their families who believe in Our Lord. You would think that faith in Jesus would be enough to get them to alter their behavior, but unfortunately we all know that faith alone isn't enough.

Works are the outer actions that put the oil in our lamps of faith. That is why the 5 wise bridesmaids wouldn't give away any of their oil. With this image in mind, the hubris of the 5 foolish bridesmaids leaps off the page into our face. They felt entitled to the wise bridesmaids works and in our mind's eye we can see them leaving in a huff to find oil long after the market was closed for the day. In our lives, how can we make up for a life of neglecting to put oil in our lamps in the 12th hour? Particularly when we don't know when that 12th hour will take place.

Our faith, our love for Jesus inspires us to take action to care for our neighbors. That action supports and grows our faith; which calls us to more action. We need to grow this faith and action cycle throughout our lives. It is our inner resource, our love for God demonstrated by our love for those we encounter, the oil for our lamps.

It is also the fundamental vocation for every one of us, to live the 2 great commandments: To love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds. And to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. The first commandment drives us to the second. The second demands action. We serve one another in order to serve God. As an example; walking up to a homeless person and saying 'love you' will get you a strange look on both sides of the incense curtain and that is about it.

Walking up to that same person and providing in some small, material way for their welfare out of love is an entirely different matter. Visiting the sick, caring for the elderly, any of the corporal or spiritual acts of mercy are all part of our fundamental vocation as children of God. This faith and action provides the foundation for what we normally discuss as vocations, the call to married life, or to be a Priest or to life as a Brother or Sister in a Religious Order.

The call to any vocation is a call of love. It is based on the oil, the inner resource, the grace that can only come from God in our lives. This is why our fundamental vocation is so important. If we haven't given love, how will we know how to receive it? I know that the immediate argument is that we have received love from our parents and that should be enough, but it isn't. Children who are loved but who are not taught to love others through action become spoiled, entitled adults, unprepared for the life of sacrifice required for any vocation. As parents we must teach our children how to love others and to take action based on that love in the home.

That leads us to the vocation that most of us are called to, married life. Marriage, the covenant between a man and a woman and God, witnessed by the Church is the primary building block of society. It is the fundamental relationship between a man and a woman and the foundation of the domestic church. It reveals the love that Christ has for his Church and within the marriage as husband and wife in their sacrifices for one another become the face of Christ to each other.

The importance of having children raised by their mother and father in a loving, Christian marriage cannot be overstated. The first thing a child learns is how to love and they begin to learn it before their eyes are open. They learn it through the interaction of their parents.

The tragedy of divorce takes a toll on children that in many ways is greater than the death of one of the parents. Children need both parents. Mothers as hard as they try can never be the man, the father a child needs and fathers can never be the woman, the mother. If you doubt the impact, ask any teacher. They can tell the children who are being raised a happy, loving marriage and the children of parents who are divorced just by their behavior. There are way too many single parents caught up in the tragedy of divorce, or the death of their spouse who are wonderful parents and we need to support them with our love and our prayers.

Father Gaul always says that; “marriage is a fine institution, and institutions are for crazy people.” All of us who have been married for a day or 2 know this to be a fact. Marriage is hard work, raising children is harder work; supporting each other in good times and bad, sickness and in health isn’t easy. But when you get a few grey hairs and look back, it is all worth the effort.

In our society today too many people are living together as husband and wife without the benefit of the Sacrament of Marriage. If they decide to marry, statically they are twice as likely to be divorced as a couple who lived apart from one another prior to marriage since they feel that they have lost the ability to say no because their property is intertwined. The free life-giving act of marriage is reduced to aerobics intended to release their tensions, and there is the issue with living in a state of mortal sin. This is just my own opinion, I believe this is happening because as a society we are too focused on ourselves, we ignore our fundamental vocation which requires self discipline, and have confused love spelled l o v e with love spelled l u s t.

Saint John Paul II when speaking on the vocations of marriage and religious life said; “[these are] two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with us. When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy exist; when human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the creator, renunciation of it for the sake of the kingdom of heaven loses its meaning.” Eye opening isn’t it? The Sacrament of Marriage lived as God intends is essential for the vocation of the priesthood or religious life.

The call to the priesthood or religious life is also a call of love. It calls for a love so deep and so compelling that those who answer it give up many of the joys and consolations during life’s difficult moments that most of us take for granted for the sake of the kingdom. Many people are looking for a ‘Saint Paul moment’ where they are knocked off their horse to tell them that they have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. Probably not going to happen.

Our God isn’t into grand displays. The wine at the wedding in Cana didn’t change color. The servant thought he was carrying water to the head steward. I never would have considered the Diaconate without many hours over several years spent in quiet prayer during Eucharistic Adoration simply because I wanted the quiet time with Jesus. Even when I realized what I

was being called to, I didn't want to admit to it or commit to it. That just elevated the struggle and discussion to a higher level.

On the other hand, Father Gaul knew that he wanted to be a priest when he was 6 years old. He isn't alone, I know another lad who was a member of this parish who had regular conversations with Our Blessed Mother every morning about the priesthood when he was 6 or 7. I know another priest that when he was a teenager his mother just knew he was going to end up dead on the wrong side of the tracks.

The point is that everybody's journey is different. What is common to all of them is the willingness to be open and listen to God's call. When you hear it, do not be afraid! Great love requires great sacrifice and great courage. If you are called to the priesthood or religious life, God will provide whatever you need in abundance.

There is also a third option that doesn't get enough press and that is to live a chaste life as a single person in the secular world. Everyone isn't called to or capable of marriage, and they are not interested in being a Priest, Brother or Sister. They serve God and their neighbors through exercising our fundamental vocation as children of God while leading a celibate life.

We are all called to a vocation. The question for us is; do we have the love, the courage, the oil in our lamp to live our vocation as Our Lord asks us to live it?