



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOULS OF THE CARDINALS AND BISHOPS WHO DIED OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

*Vatican Basilica, Altar of the Chair of Saint Peter
Saturday, 3 November 2018*

[Multimedia]

In the parable of today's Gospel, we heard that the bridesmaids, all ten of them, "went forth to meet the bridegroom" (*Mt 25:1*). For all of us, life is a constant call to *go forth*: from our mother's womb, from the house where we are born, from infancy to youth, from youth to adulthood, all the way to our going forth from this world. For ministers of the Gospel too, life is in constant movement, as we go forth from our family home to wherever the Church sends us, from one variety of service to another. We are always on the move, until we make our final journey.

The Gospel shows us the meaning of this constant wayfaring that is life: it is a *going forth to meet the Bridegroom*. This is what life is meant to be lived for: the call that resounds in the night, according to the Gospel, and which we will hear at the hour of our death: "Here is the Bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" (v. 6). The encounter with Jesus, the Bridegroom who "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (*Eph 5:25*), gives meaning and direction to our lives. That and nothing more. It is the finale that illuminates everything that preceded it. Just as the seeding is judged by the harvest, so the journey of life is shaped by its ultimate goal.

If our life is a journey to meet the Bridegroom, it is also the time we have been granted *to grow in love*. Every day of our lives is a preparation for the wedding banquet, a great period of betrothal. Let us ask ourselves: do I live like someone preparing to meet the Bridegroom? In the ministry, amid all our meetings, activities and paperwork, we must never lose sight of the one thread that

holds the entire fabric together: our expectation of the Bridegroom. The centre of it all can only be a heart in love with the Lord. Only in this way will the visible body of our ministry be sustained by an invisible soul. Here we begin to realize what the Apostle tells us in the second reading: “We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). Let us not keep our gaze fixed on earthly affairs, but look beyond them. It is true when they say that the really important things are invisible to our eyes. The really important thing in life is hearing the voice of the Bridegroom. That voice asks us daily to catch sight of the Lord who comes, and to make our every activity a means of preparation for his wedding banquet.

We are reminded of this by what the Gospel tells is the one essential thing for the bridesmaids awaiting the wedding banquet. It is not their gowns, or their lamps, but rather the *oil* kept in small jars.

Here we see a first feature of oil: *it is not impressive*. It remains hidden; it does not appear, yet without it there is no light. What does this suggest to us? That in the Lord’s eyes what matters is not appearances but the heart (cf. 1 Sam 16:7). Everything that the world runs after and then parades – honours, power, appearances, glory – passes away and leaves nothing behind. Detachment from worldly appearances is essential to our preparation for heaven. We need to say no to the “cosmetic culture” that tells us to worry about how we look. Instead of our outward appearance that passes away, we should purify and keep custody of our heart, our inner self, which is precious in the eyes of God.

Along with this first feature – not to be flashy but essential – there is another aspect of oil: *it exists in order to be consumed*. Only when it is burned does it spread light. Our lives are like that: they radiate light only if they are consumed, if they spend themselves in service. The secret to live is to live to serve. Service is the ticket to be presented at the door of the eternal wedding banquet. Whatever will remain of life, at the doorstep of eternity, is not what we gained but what we gave away (cf. Mt 6:19-21; 1 Cor 13:8). The meaning of life is found in our response to God’s offer of love. And that response is made up of true love, self-giving and service. Serving others involved a cost, since it involves spending ourselves, letting ourselves be consumed. In our ministry, those who do not live to serve do not deserve to live. Those who hold on too tightly to their lives will lose them.

A third feature of oil is clearly present in the Gospel: *it must be prepared*. Oil has to be stored up ahead of time and carried with one (cf. vv. 4, 7). Love is certainly spontaneous, but it is not impromptu. It was precisely by their lack of preparation that the bridesmaids excluded from the wedding banquet showed their foolishness. Now is the time for preparation: here and now, day by day, love has to be stored up and fostered. Let us ask for grace to renew daily our first love with the Lord (cf. Rev 2:4), lest its flame die out. It is a great temptation to sink into a life without love, which ends up being like an empty vase, a snuffed lamp. If we do not invest in love, life will stifle it.

Those called to God's wedding feast cannot be content with a sedentary, flat and humdrum life that plods on without enthusiasm, seeking petty satisfactions and pursuing fleeting rewards. A dreary and predictable life, content to carry out its duties without giving of itself, is unworthy of the Bridegroom.

As we pray for the Cardinals and Bishops who have passed away in this last year, let us beg the intercession of all those who lived unassuming lives, content to prepare daily to meet the Lord. Following the example of these witnesses, who praise God are all around us in great numbers, let us not be content with a quick glance at this day and nothing else. Instead, let us desire to look farther ahead, to the wedding banquet that awaits us. A life burning with desire for God and trained by love will be prepared to enter the chamber of the Bridegroom, and this, forever.