

- It has to be one of the most chilling sentences in all of scripture. The bridegroom telling those unprepared that he cannot let them in: *Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.*
  - As we near the end of the liturgical year, our readings focus us on the last things: death, judgement, heaven, and hell.
  - Heaven and hell aren't physical locations but they are ultimate destinations based on God's grace but also our choices. Heaven and Hell are states of soul.
  - *And today, as we celebrate the baptism of Romena Barros, we start her down the journey to heave, helping her avoid the pains of hell by the Father's adoption of her.*
  - There's relatively little about hell in the gospels. In truth, we owe more of our picture of hell to Hollywood or to writers and artists like Dante or Hieronymus Bosch and fire-and-brimstone preachers than we do to Jesus even as He makes clear today that hell is being kept from God., always by one's own choice or, at least refusal to prepare.
  - Heaven, the kingdom, is just the opposite, being with God, celebrating the wedding banquet we hear about again in our gospel.
- Jesus used this and several previous parables to describe the coming of the kingdom and our need to be prepared. The act of "being prepared" can also speak to us about discipleship and our relationship with God and one another.
  - The point is that we do not know the "hour or the day." Members of the Christian community living in Thessalonica at the time of St. Paul looked for the Lord's return in the present time and had concerns regarding the resurrection in which we would all share.

- We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent, especially when it comes to our relationship with God. This relationship colors every aspect of our life and every part of our existence.
- At the same time, we realize that we need God’s love and grace to enable us to carry out our responsibilities—both physical and spiritual.
- We may not know the day or hour but we can be prepared. We have been given the gift of faith—we have a relationship with God—a relationship to which we must cling with all of our strength.
- Let us pray that our knowledge and understanding of God will help us to remain prepared to meet him on the last day and celebrate forever in the banquet in heaven.
- We’re all invited to the feast and we taste heaven every time we come together to worship.
- This is not some accident of fate or timing or family lineage. We have been invited by God who not only called us to baptism but brought us here this morning (this evening).
  
- The wise virgins in our Gospel today were happy because they knew their place.
  - They weren’t the bride - or the bridegroom. They were attendants. “I’m just here to help out. I serve hors d’oeuvres; I play in the band; I just check coats...But, God! What’a party!”
  - Those who know their place in God’s plan will be a great deal more blessed than those hyper-aware of what they think they “deserve.”
  - Don’t get me wrong. When I say “knowing one’s place in God’s plan,” I’m not talking about a state in life, a career path

or physical location. I am talking about our place as God's beloved children, disciples of Jesus, attendants to the Bridegroom.

- And there is no difference in this “place” for the rich or for poor, for black or for white, for priest or for lay faithful, for young or old.
- It's the wisdom mentioned in our first reading: searching for wisdom, searching for God. Wisdom is not a trick to be learned or a puzzle to be solved. It is about accepting God's grace, God's gifts and determining how we use them best for God's glory.
- *I must admit that I was hesitant to continue talking about stewardship even as we remembered and honored those in our community who have died and bless the courtyard stones that commemorate them.*
- *But then I looked at the list and thought about those who have gone before us and realize how much they have to tell us about stewardship.*
  - *When I think of children of God:*
    - *I think of Bob Moody who, much like I am in my family was the adult who always chose to sit at the kids table. He loved life and he shared the joy with his children and grandchildren.*
    - *I also think of Kate Kilonsky who always had a positive word and a smile. Whenever I saw her, even as she was fighting her own challenges with health, she was bringing joy to others, even to the nursing home where she spent the last few months of life.*
  - *When I think of disciples of Jesus Christ:*
    - *I think of Karen Siedlarz who fought her own past and her own body to come every week. Simply getting here was a triumph.*

- *I think of Kate Smith who, every time she was here was bring somebody with her, getting them to meet me and sharing with them the love of Jesus Christ. One of her peers at the wake service on the night before her funeral spoke eloquently of Kate's joy, her sense of humor, her spirit of fun, of the way she would reach out especially to those who were struggling. When I saw Kate at something, he said, I knew I was going to be accepted, knew I was going to have fun.*
- *I think of Lee Breczinski who with his wife Rosemary would leave Church on Sunday and then spend a good part of his afternoon bringing Holy Communion to others.*
- *I think of Chris Molander and all of the work he did with and for our Boy Scouts.*
- *I think of William Barry who prayed his wife here every week so she could come and find the support of our community.*
- *When I think of attendants to the bridegroom:*
  - *I think of Bill Simms who literally helped to start this parish. He would do anything that needed to be done, even driving around picking up pieces of furniture and other items for our auction.*
  - *I think of Don Phillips. I think of him whenever I look out of my window and see the roses he took such good care of. More than that, though, I think of the yowman's work he did on investigating our heating and air-conditioning. He put together a report so thorough that I think our investment in increased insulation was the first unanimous vote that carried across the finance committee, the facilities committee and the pastoral council.*

- *I think of Don Full who helped count money. Not only was he an accurate counter, he would always be looking after the one who went around with him to get the candle money and the poor boxes.*
- *I think of Tim Geisinger who worked with us only for a short time. I remember once, during the week, coming over to this side of the building and seeing a man with Tim. Tim introduced me to the man, using the man's name as if they were long time friends. Actually, they had just met. The man was upset and had come to the church building on a spur of the moment. The door was locked but Tim was working there and saw the man knocking. He let the man in, let him go into the church, prayed quietly with him and then was showing the man around. The man came looking for Christ and found one of Christ's attendants.*
- Knowing our place as Christian disciples, then, is a perfect departure to reflect on stewardship because good stewardship is all about recognizing that God has put us in our place, given us the gifts we have, and wants us to use them for the good of our sisters and brothers.
  - It's a blessing to reflect on our place and God's gifts to us here as we celebrate some of the greatest gifts God has given us, namely the Eucharist celebrated in this church building, the very symbolic heart of our community, with the heat, air conditioning and lights made possible by our generosity and that of our forefathers and mothers.
  - We are not doing this because of the pastorate and our being teamed with St. Francis-St. Mary.

- We're doing this because we haven't focused on stewardship in awhile in our parish.
  - Over the last few years, giving has remained almost constant even as expenses have increased. Again, it is not so much about the pastorate as it is about costs rising around us and the need to do things differently.
  - As I tried to explain in the town hall meetings, it is about building the community Christ calls us to be, one that will not only take care of our needs, not only maintain where we are but also reach out to those who are not here.
  - So many of you have said to me that your kids fight you or simply don't go to church, that your grandchildren don't go, that your friends don't see any value in going.
  - We are seeking to help all of these find a home, to create a community that reaches out to walk with those who are not here, those who are struggling, even as we walk with all of us who are struggling.
- One of the most painful things to me is that only about 30% of our registered parishioners support this parish financially and even fewer bear the burden with time and talent. Somehow we have failed as Church to those who are not connected enough to give, who don't understand the responsibility of discipleship and the joy that comes from making a return to the Lord.
- Many of you know that even as it represents a sacrifice, true giving also brings joy, both to you who give and to those who hear the gospel because of it.

SO, I ASK OUR GREETERS PLEASE TO BEGIN PASSING OUT THE STEWARDSHIP LEAFLETS.

- I ask every adult to take one. This is not only about financial giving. When we get to the part on treasure, financial giving there will be a place to indicate that you do that as a family.
- Remember last week. Stewardship is not about giving only because we have an immediate need, although we do. With our time, talent, and treasure, we are seeking to make palpable and practical the return we offer to God on all that God has given us, how we give back God. Using today's Gospel, it's part of how we are prepared like those ten wise virgins.
- The information on this leaflet is not just for those who are new, or for those aren't involved yet or those who aren't giving yet. This effort at stewardship is intended to help each of us reflect where we are now but, even more, indicate in hope and trust where God is leading us to take the next step.

*Pause until all have a leaflet.*

- On the cover of the leaflet, I ask you to
  - Write your first and last name.
  - Also, include your address if it has recently changed.
  - Please write a phone number and email address we can use to reach you. E-mails and even phone numbers often change so I ask you to write it in, even if you think we already have it
  - Also, indicate your Envelope number if you have it. If not, then please don't worry about it.
- Again, I ask each adult to do this separately. This is not only about finances for those who do joint finances which is most

of you, there will be a place to indicate that when we get to the section on treasure

- Let me give you a moment to finish up with the first page.

*Pause until most have finished.*

- Now, I ask you to open the leaflet
- On the left hand side of the leaflet, I want you take a moment to think about your time. Here, as last week, I'm speaking about time only with regards to relationship to God.
  - How are you going to give back to God some of the 1,440 minutes God gives you in each day?
  - How can you build up your relationship with God? No matter the state or stage in life, we have to think practically about giving God some time.
  - This will be different for each and every person, different for the mother of a new-born child than for a young person in school than for a retired person, different for one who works a hectic job (or more than one) than for one who can direct at least part of his or her schedule.
  - Prayer is not something we can track as a parish, nor should we.
  - But it is something that each one of us should think about and dedicate ourselves to doing, even if it is only for a few moments every day. And we wanted to include it here, as part of our time, talent, and treasure, to demonstrate how a good prayer life, is part of the essential stewardship of the blessings that God has given you and a deepening prayer life always serves our community even as it brings you closer to God.

*Pause until most have finished.*

- Now, I ask you to look at the right hand side of the leaflet.
- Here, I want you take a moment to think about your talents and the way that you can use those talents for the good of our community. Here, as last week, I am speaking about the talent we can share with our community.
- Those ministries listed are the ones with the greatest immediate need. Most are common to both communities while some are specific to each. For example we need ushers and greeters and servers in both communities and cleaners in both churches. But only St. Francis - St. Mary has a cemetery and only Holy Family has a nursery.
- The goal is to use your strengths, your passions to help our community spread the Gospel. Some of the ministries are during Mass while others are outside of Mass.
- Here we are **not asking for what you are already involved in** but how you will expand your service, if you can, take the next step, to serve God within our community.
- Check one or two boxes that are new and someone from the ministry will be in touch to help you get started.

*Pause until most have finished.*

- Now, I ask you to look at the back cover of the leaflet. Here, we are asking you now to make known your commitment of treasure to support this work of our parish family...
- All parishioners are asked to support our parish. Those of you who do not use Direct Deposit or envelopes are asked to do so. It's an important part of belonging to a parish as it helps to keep us accountable to God through this community.

- With our treasure especially, God is calling us to take the next step. As I mentioned last week, we can all give to God
  - If you are not giving anything, give something.
  - If your giving something but only from pocket change, then plan your gift.
  - If you are planning your gift, start giving proportionately, a percentage of what God has given you.
  - If you are giving a percentage then increase that until all of your giving, here and to other causes, represents 10 percent, the biblical tithe.
  - And if you are already tithing as I know some of you are, then rest easy where you are.
- Especially with our finances, we must recognize all that we have as a gift, and see what we give as part of our focus on God, on making a return.
- Look at the chart provided. Down the left hand side are amounts reflecting a given weekly income. In the columns to the right are amount and percentages of that income. Find what you are giving and see what percentage it represents.
- Again, God asks you to give in proportion to all that He has given you. For some, a very limited amount of weekly income means a very limited amount of giving but everyone can give something.
- I ask you to find where you are now and then take the next step by moving one black to the left and indicate that amount on the line provided. Remember, as Father John said, God will never be outdone in generosity.

- Especially for those who are uncomfortable, I ask you to remember and to trust the Lord's generosity with the return from you and your family.
  - Our trust is not some inanimate object, or some distant, uncaring god. In that trust, with that trust, we come closer to Jesus Christ who stopped at nothing, even to giving his own life.
  - Indeed, Jesus demonstrates most profoundly on the Cross, His own trust in God: *Father, into your hands I place my spirit.*
  - Christ, then, is not only our model but the source of our trust and the generosity that should flow from it.
  - I'll give you a few moments now to indicate how you can take the next step in sharing with God a return on the financial blessings God has given you.

*Pause until most have finished.*

- When you are finished, I ask you to close the inside out so that the personal information is enclosed inside the leaflet. Then I ask you to fold it in half.
- Now, I ask our ushers to begin collecting the leaflets and the pencils.
- On behalf of God and our parish, I thank you for your generosity, especially to our community. May God bless you today and always.

*For the Lord himself, with a word of command,  
with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God,  
will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise.*