

BE PREPARED AND READY FOR ACTION!

Mt 25.1-13 Wis 6.12-16 1Thess 4.13-18

Well, to me it feels that the world is likely to be a significantly safer place this weekend, and I know we have a few virtual global participants, beyond our local parish community here in Essendon. So, I extend a special welcome to Ruth and Ted in Whitby, Toronto, and Jeanette in Pennsylvania, as we breathe a hopeful joint sigh of relief!

Now, locally, here in Melbourne, we hope to see further gradual lifting of restrictions after zero cases of infections and deaths from coronavirus this week, after 7 months now of church closure. We are planning to open for weekday Masses at 10.00am from this coming Wednesday, but limited to 20 attending, which means phone booking will be required. Please take note. It is not just a simple return to normal. Masks must be worn throughout Mass, and pews are marked for physical distancing, as prescribed. Admittedly, old habits might die hard, but we need to develop some new ones, in changed circumstances. Seating might have to be in different places to your usual spot! And we will continue to record weekday and weekend Masses on the parish website.

And a special mention in this Mass for Eddie Gauci, whose funeral was here recently in early October, as we offer our sympathy to his loving family, wife Lyn, and sons Jonathan, Louis and Ryan.

So we pray together, as we gather again, together in spirit.

Given that Year 12 or VCE students are at the point of beginning their final end of year exams, I thought I'd use a story about one particular Year 12 student, who had to adapt in more ways than one. There's no denying that it has been a very different, demanding and unnerving year, with on-line remote learning, and adjusting to self-discipline, in getting assignments done and submitted, tuning in regularly to teachers, and listening to their advice and seeking and responding to their support.

The Age newspaper had an article this weekend, titled *Year 12 student's COVID juggle*, concerning a young chap named Jolyon Simpson, a VCE student at St Joseph's in Geelong. He and his younger sister Matilda, who attends Sacred Heart College, live with their parents, Paul and Helen, in Ocean Grove, not a bad spot for a keen surfer like him!! (Not that he has had much time for it in recent times!) His parents are both healthcare workers, and were quickly into the front line caring for 150 residents in aged care, after a fatal coronavirus outbreak in July. Paul contracted the virus in the first week, and Helen seems to have caught it from him. Meanwhile, Jolyon took on the responsibility of caring for them at home, whilst trying to continue his studies on-line. His teachers encouraged him to give priority to his parents, but he managed to log on for studies when he could as well. We wish him and all VCE students well for 2020 and their futures.

It has evolved into a good news story all around, as his parents are recovering well, and the practical and generous response of many in their school communities, in providing daily food parcels and cooked meals meant that he could continue his studies, with a great boost to morale for all, and demonstrating the silver lining of service that can come from adversity, bringing out the best in people, happy to go out of their way to help. Simple, practical stuff!

I have to say that, in general, I find a very positive sense of Gospel values and faith, taught and lived in our local Catholic school communities, both primary and secondary. It's a credit to the leadership and example of those committed to imparting the spirit of Christian discipleship in practice, in the context of a complex secular world, where the challenge for all of us is to live that faith in word and action. And this difficult, protracted year of 2020, has certainly brought out the best in many situations of care, self-sacrifice, generosity and service.

When it comes to today's Gospel, at face value, it all seems a bit unfair, with the obvious question being why the so-called wise bridesmaids couldn't have shared their excess oil with the foolish ones, who weren't so well prepared for a long wait for the groom to turn up, strange as these customs might appear to us today. Some interpreters see the oil as a metaphor for good works, and the lack of oil as indicative of failure to take personal

responsibility, just expecting a free ticket to the party, so to speak, or salvation, in theological terms. The image of the closed door, when they finally come back out of the dark, is a reminder that admission is not automatic, but earned by active response.

The point is made that the parable shouldn't be taken literally, and has the one key message, that it is necessary to be ready to face unpredictable contingencies, without just presuming others will take responsibility. Matthew is approaching the conclusion of Jesus' teaching in his public ministry, and it has what's called an eschatological tone, that the end is near, so the need is for disciples to get ready to do something useful, and not just passively look up at the sky like a thirsty turkey, waiting for rain, or whatever comes next! It's a call to ongoing engagement, not just a one-up celebration.

What's the old line from the late 18th century, perhaps from Irish statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke? *"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men (and women) do nothing."* And then there is Mahatma Gandhi's line: *"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."* But, of course, you and I can only do this working together to make a difference for the better, not as sole operators. And Oscar Romero, in his last words before his assassination whilst saying Mass in a hospital in 1980: *"God's reign is already present on our earth in mystery. When the Lord comes, it will be brought to perfection. That is the hope that inspires Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us."* As Brendan Byrne SJ puts it well, once again: *"The parable and the Gospel as a whole, remind us that the words of dismissal at the Eucharist: '**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord**', are no perfunctory conclusion to the rite but a programme for living the twin commandment of love of God and love of neighbour."* This reiterates the Gospel message of a few weeks ago, committing us to applying the fundamental law of love to our lives and choices.

This seems to me to fit the today's theme, that apathy, ignorance and lassitude or laziness, are not good enough for the engaged Christian disciple, following the way of Jesus, as we approach the end of the Church's Year A, and Jesus' final practical exhortations or instructions from Matthew's Gospel.

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8th November 2020