

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

A poetic reading. In Greek and Jewish cultures, Wisdom was traditionally feminized. In this reading, Wisdom is a personified woman who acts and responds and can even be observed.

LECTIONARY #154

READING I Wisdom 6:12-16

A reading from the Book of Wisdom

**Resplendent and unfading is wisdom,**  
and she is **readily perceived** by those who love her,  
and **found** by those who seek her.  
She **hastens** to make herself known in **anticipation**  
of their **desire**;  
whoever **watches** for her at **dawn** shall **not** be **disappointed**,  
for he shall find her **sitting** by his **gate**.  
For taking **thought** of **wisdom** is the **perfection** of **prudence**,  
and **whoever** for her **sake** keeps **vigil**  
shall **quickly** be **free** from **care**;  
because she **makes** her own **rounds**, seeking those **worthy**  
of her,  
and **graciously** appears to them in the **ways**,  
and **meets** them with all **solicitude**.

READING I

Our first reading comes from the Book of Wisdom. When the author of this book writes about wisdom, he presents her as a personified, feminine power of God, because the Greek word for wisdom is *sophia*, a feminine noun. Today's reading, which focuses on wisdom's accessibility, is part of a longer exhortation to those who wish to be wise. Wisdom is the speaker. She exhorts kings and princes

to seek wisdom, because God will punish them harshly if they do not change their ways (Wisdom 6:1-11).

In today's reading, Wisdom's accessibility is described in terms of the theme of seeking and finding, which is also found in Proverbs 1:20-21; 3:13-18; and 8:1-36. Wisdom's unfading radiance is due to her connection to the divine. Elsewhere in Wisdom, she is described as reflecting

divine light, as a mirror (Wisdom 7:26). The people who love her learn to be discerning and free from care because she is with them, appearing in their paths and meeting them "with all solicitude." What a beautiful message! If we seek wisdom in discerning love, we will find her and become like her.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 63:2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8 (2b)

**R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.**

<p>O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.</p> <p>Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory, for your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you.</p>	<p>Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name. As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you.</p> <p>I will remember you upon my couch, and through the night-watches I will meditate on you: you are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.</p>
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READING II Thessalonians 4:13–18

**A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians**

[We do not want you to be **unaware, brothers and sisters,**  
about **those** who have **fallen asleep,**  
so that you **may not grieve** like the **rest,** who have **no hope.**  
For if we **believe** that **Jesus died and rose,**  
**so too will God,** through **Jesus,**  
**bring** with him those who have **fallen asleep.**]  
**Indeed,** we **tell** you this, on the **word** of the **Lord,**  
that **we** who are **alive,**  
who are **left** until the **coming** of the **Lord,**  
will **surely not precede** those who have **fallen asleep.**  
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 **first.** »

Thessalonians = thes-uh-LOH-nee-uhnz

Emphasis on "not."

Slight pause between "Jesus" and "died."

archangel = AHRK-ayn-jihl

**READING II** One of the main topics of Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is how the community should deal with the delayed parousia, the return of the risen Christ at the end time. Apparently, they understood from Paul that the return of the risen Christ would happen very soon, since resurrection from the dead was thought to be a sign of the end time. Now, some twenty years later, the parousia has not yet happened. This young Christian community is deeply troubled because some of their members are dying. Paul's response is unequivocal! Since we

believe Jesus died and was raised from the dead, God will surely raise your beloved deceased from the dead. Paul continues in the style of a prophet, declaring "on the word of the Lord" how this end time parousia will come about. The imagery is reminiscent of God's appearance to Moses on Sinai or a king's entrance into a heavenly throne room. The line about being "caught up . . . in the clouds" refers to the ancient belief that spiritual beings used clouds as their vehicles to get around heaven. In the midst of this grand imagery, notice that Paul's message is one of consolation and encour-

agement. Their beloved dead are not lost. Indeed, they will be the first to enter into the divine presence!

**GOSPEL** Today's Gospel reading is about both seeking wisdom and anticipating the end time appearance of the risen Christ. It is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, which is found only in Matthew's Gospel. Parables are fictional stories that establish a comparison—in this case, "the kingdom of heaven will be like . . ."—and that involve common, everyday images to communi-

Paul's apocalyptic view reveals itself as the reading intensifies toward its conclusion. He's sharing a vision of end times with his fellow believers.

A reading that consists of the telling of a straightforward parable whose message is for believers to be prepared.

Slight pause between "feast" and "with."

cate their meaning. The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is often misunderstood to refer to heaven. However, it is better understood as the full manifestation of the reign of God and the dissolution of evil and suffering in the land.

Unfortunately, because wedding feasts were a common reality in first-century Jewish communities, the modern reader is given few details about what took place at these celebrations. Yet from other contemporaneous sources we know that marriages were contractual relationships between families for the purposes of estab-

Then **we who are alive, who are left,**  
will be **caught up together** with them in the **clouds**  
to **meet the Lord** in the **air**.

**Thus we shall always be with the Lord.**  
**Therefore, console one another** with these **words**.

[Shorter Form: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14]

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GOSPEL Matthew 25:1–13

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew**

**Jesus told his disciples this parable:**

**"The kingdom of heaven** will be like **ten virgins**  
who took their **lamps** and went **out** to meet the **bridegroom**.

**Five** of them were **foolish** and **five** were **wise**.

The **foolish** ones, when **taking** their **lamps**,

brought **no oil** with them,

but the **wise** brought **flasks** of **oil** with their **lamps**.

Since the **bridegroom** was **long delayed**,

they **all** became **drowsy** and **fell asleep**.

At **midnight**, there was a **cry**,

**'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'**

Then **all those virgins** got **up** and **trimmed** their **lamps**.

The **foolish** ones said to the **wise**,

**'Give us some of your oil,**  
for our **lamps** are going **out**.'

But 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**.'

While they **went off** to **buy** it,

the **bridegroom** came

and **those who were ready** went into the **wedding feast**

**with him**.

lishing alliances or protecting resources, so the betrothal contract was an important first step in the process. The wedding itself, which could go on for several days or even a week, was focused on the process of transferring the bride from her father's home to her husband's home, which was often somewhere near or even within his father's home. When the procession of the groom to the bride's home and back to his home was complete, the bride and groom would consummate their marriage, with the witnesses waiting outside to confirm the bride's virginity prior to consummation,

after which the witnesses would accompany the bride and groom into the banquet area for lots of feasting!

If we allow ourselves a bit of allegory, we can imagine the ten virgins (the bridesmaids)—young girls not yet eligible for marriage—as the witnesses to the consummation event. Five were not wise and did not prepare sufficiently for the delay of the bridegroom, the parousia of the risen Christ. Because they had to go and purchase more oil for their lamps, they missed the opportunity to accompany the bridal couple when they joined the wedding ban-

Then the door was locked.  
Afterwards the other virgins came and said,  
    'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!'  
But he said in reply,  
    'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.'  
Therefore, stay awake,  
for you know neither the day nor the hour."

quiet, and they were not allowed into the feast later, because the bridegroom did not know who they were. Although biblical scholars are divided about the significance of the wedding feast, in this context it likely represents the messianic banquet that is supposed to accompany the end time. The message of the parable is "If you are wise, you will stay alert and ready for the bridegroom's coming!" C.C.