

9 August 2024 - Feast of Saint Thérèse-Bénédicté of the Cross (Edith Stein)

[Deut 10:12-22; Mt 17:22-27.](#)

Homily

For this feast, the liturgical lectionary offers us first of all a beautiful text from Hosea, where God calls his bride to lead her into the desert and speak to her heart, in faithfulness and tenderness. Then we have the Gospel reading of the parable of the ten virgins invited to the wedding.

If you don't mind, let's reflect a little on this parable, starting with the last sentence: "Watch therefore, for you know not the day nor the hour". Even if this brief sentence seems to come as a bolt from the blue, it is the logical conclusion of the preceding narrative. "Watching" here does not mean waiting passively, but living with eyes open and attentive.

The story of this parable takes place in the context -- well known to Jesus' listeners -- of a wedding, according to the customs of Israel, where the bride, accompanied by several young girls, awaited the arrival of the bridegroom, himself accompanied by his companions, to begin the feast, before they were both ushered into the bridal chamber. Of the ten girls in question, five were far-sighted (or wise) and had brought oil for their lamps; and five were foolish and had forgotten to do so.

To fully understand this parable, as told by Matthew, we need to relate it to another teaching of Jesus, which is found with the same terminology in Matthew. This is the teaching about the house built on rock or built on sand. Everyone who hears the words that I have just spoken," Jesus said, "can be compared to a wise (or prudent) man who built his house on the rock.... And everyone who hears the words I have just spoken and does not put them into practice can be compared to a foolish (or careless) man who built his house on sand...". (Matt. 7, 24-27). And this text was preceded by the other text where Jesus warns that on the day of judgement he will say to those who prophesied in his name and even cast out demons in his name, but did not do his Father's will: "I never knew you" (Matt. 7, 21-23) - the same words he addresses in our text today to the foolish young girls.

Olive oil had a very important place in biblical antiquity, alongside bread and wine. It was used to prepare food and as a medicine, as well as a cosmetic tonic to enhance the beauty of the body. It was also used to make various perfumes and, of course, as

Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

fuel for lamps. Here, in our parable, oil is the symbol of fidelity to the word of Jesus, to his first commandment, that of love. It's something we all have to live by. It's not out of selfishness that the wise virgins can't share it with the foolish ones; it's because no one can live it for others. Everyone has to do it for themselves.

Ultimately, the teaching of this parable is simple. It can be summed up in this simple sentence: "In the evening of our lives, we will be judged on the basis of love". We will be admitted to the wedding banquet between God and humanity insofar as we have our baggage of love, insofar as we have put into practice during our lives this first commandment, which includes all the others. If we have not done so, whatever great things we may have done in our lives, including our prayers and acts of virtue, we risk being told: "Too bad, I don't know you!

But so that we don't end on that note, let's not forget to reread the beautiful text by the prophet Hosea, which tells us about the kind of relationship God wants to have with his people, but also with each person in that people: "I will make you my wife (and not just the wife's friend). I will make you my wife in justice and righteousness, in faithfulness and tenderness... and you will know the Lord.

Knowing the Lord... That's all that matters!