

32nd Sunday – Year A

When I have shared this parable with grade school students, one of the things that pops out for them immediately is the question, “Why didn’t they share?”

Sharing is something we learn in kindergarten, so hearing a bible story where someone doesn’t share and gets away with it causes some confusion and wrinkled foreheads.

How hard would it have been for the wise virgins to share their oil? Apparently, the argument that “there may not be enough for you and for us” does not carry a lot of weight with second-graders.

A key element of the story revolves around the use of the oil as a stand-in for something else. Parables are stories that use everyday experience to say something about the kingdom of heaven. And in this story the oil that is not being shared stands for something else that cannot be shared.

What can’t be shared when it comes to the kingdom of God?

A number of things come to mind. Holiness is one of them. Imagine that you had in your family tree a person who had been known for her great holiness. How much of that trickles down to us? My guess is, if we had a chance to converse with her about it, she would be all about encouraging us to pursue holiness ourselves.

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Another reality that falls into the category of “unshareable” would be the good effects of the good that we do. Sometimes we go out of ourselves and, in doing so, discover that we are the ones who got more out of it that we expected, maybe even more than the people we were attempting to help.

People who have gone on mission trips often report that sort of experience. And as much as they might try to convey that experience to others when they return, ultimately they end up saying something like, “You had to have been there.”

The experience can be talked about, but it can’t really be shared. It can’t have its effect unless a person exposes himself or herself to it directly.

When we reflect on today’s Gospel parable we get the idea that the wise virgins’ oil is standing in for a life-time of following the Lord, not only in word but in action. That’s an important dividing line: those who hear the Word, and those who hear the Word and put it into practice, and not just occasionally, but as a habit of their faith.

They are the ones who will be prepared when the bridegroom, Christ, arrives.

When a family brings a baby to be baptized, at the very beginning of the celebration, the priest or deacon doing the baptizing asks the parents and

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godparents, “Are you ready to accept the responsibility of training the baby in the practice of the faith?”

There’s practice involved when it comes to the life of faith. It’s not something that happens automatically. It’s not magic. It’s about doing the things that move us forward.

It begins with believing that God’s promises to us will be fulfilled, and letting that trust motivate us to go out on a limb and put our faith into practice in the very mundane world of loving God by loving our neighbor.

When we do that, when it becomes a hallmark of our life, we make ourselves ready to welcome the Lord will lamps full of the oil of righteous living. If we don’t, and leave our practice at the level of talking about it only, we will come up short.

That will be a bad spot to be in, so let’s not go there. The road ahead is clearly marked. But it’s up to us to do the walking.