32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – A

There is a saying that goes something like: "Common sense isn't very common." I wondered who said it, so I went to – where else – the internet – which said that this saying apparently originated with the French writer Voltaire. And then the same website offered another quote by another Frenchmen – this one by Victor Hugo, the author of Les Miserables and The Hunchback of Notre Dame: "Common sense is in spite of, not the result of, education." Which might be a little more controversial, although it's true that Germany was supposedly the most educated and most literate country in the world when Hitler was elected in the 1930s. Of course I believe that education is good, important and necessary – our parish has a Catholic school after all – but something more besides education is also necessary.

I would say that the other necessary piece to education is virtue. Without virtue, a person or a society or a nation can be the

best educated but still end up corrupt and morally bankrupt. This is somewhat like the difference between knowledge and wisdom. By knowledge I mean knowing lots of facts. A person can know all kinds of facts but not know how to apply that knowledge to achieve what is good and just. Having lots of knowledge can of course be beneficial in many ways – for example, it can help you get a good job, make lots of money, and be "successful" in the eyes of the world, but in spite of that, you could still lead a very troubled life. I think there are plenty of examples from all walks of life that illustrate this. That is why wisdom is so important.

So, education plus virtue, knowledge plus wisdom, and you will get much better outcomes than education without virtue, and knowledge without wisdom. And so important are virtue and wisdom, that it would be better to be virtuous but uneducated and have wisdom without knowledge, i.e. have wisdom without knowing lots of facts and information.

Our first reading is from what we call the Book of Wisdom, which is a particular genre of literature of several books of the Old Testament – other ones being the books of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon for example. Our reading from the Book of Wisdom today begins with this verse: "Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her." If you've studied foreign languages like French and Spanish and Italian and so on, one of the big differences they have from English that you learn is that in these languages all nouns have gender – they are either masculine or feminine – and what is considered masculine and feminine doesn't always make sense. [There's a comedy routine about the invention of Spanish, and the men who gathered to "invent" the language decided that every word was either a boy or a girl. One man decided that the word *ocean* is a boy because "it's fun, but sometimes, for no reason, it can kill you." But then he was asked, "So *dress* is a girl, right?" And he said, "No, *dress* is a boy." So it doesn't always make sense.] Thankfully we don't

really have that in English, but the ancient writers and philosophers always referred to Wisdom as feminine. Sorry, guys.

Anyway, one of the things we learn from this reading from the Book of Wisdom is that wisdom is "found by those who seek her." God of course is the source of wisdom, because He *is* wisdom, and He will give this incomparable gift to all those who truly desire it and seek it. Or I should say, who seek and desire *her*.

God desires to give us good gifts – that is, what is truly for our good. Wisdom and virtue are truly good gifts, and they are so good because they benefit us not just in this life, but they also lead us to eternal life – eternal beatitude or happiness –with the Lord one day in heaven. Wisdom and virtue are infinitely more valuable than any material thing or possession, because all material things and possessions only have value in this life, but are worthless in the next life. And of course, material things can also be misused or abused and can jeopardize our eternal happiness. So if we pray to the Lord

to bless us with material things, wealth and such, perhaps He will grant this to us, but perhaps not, because having these things might not be for our spiritual good. But if we ask the Lord for wisdom and virtue, He will certainly give us these gifts, because they are always for our benefit and our good.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. The setting of course is a wedding feast, or rather, guests who are waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom to his wedding feast. In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition of that era, young women would await the arrival of the groom, with lighted lamps. Letting the lamps run out of oil before the arrival of the groom was a major social faux pas. No doubt it was an honor to be chosen to have this role at a wedding, and so not fulfilling the function out of negligence would be a big embarrassment. We hear in the parable how the groom was delayed in coming, and they all fell asleep waiting for him. But the real problem was that five of

them did not bring any oil for their lamps, and there would not have been enough oil for all of them to keep their lamps lit – these were the foolish ones. So five of them were prepared for the coming of the groom, having brought oil for their lamps – the wise ones. And when the groom finally did come, the foolish ones were not there, having left to go buy oil for their lamps, and so they were shut out of the wedding feast.

Jesus concludes the parable by saying, "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour." As with all his parables, Jesus uses images and situations that his listeners would understand and be able to relate to. And the different elements of his parables are symbols that represent other things.

So what is Jesus trying to teach us here? What do the different elements of this parable represent: the foolish and the wise virgins, the oil lamps they carry, the bridegroom, the wedding feast?

Understanding what the symbols represent helps us understand what Jesus wants to teach us here.

Incidentally, all ten of the virgins fell asleep before the coming of the bridegroom. And Jesus concludes the parable by urging his listeners to “stay awake”. Clearly Jesus himself is the bridegroom and each one of us are the guests or the virgins waiting for his arrival for the wedding feast of heaven to begin. So, just as all the virgins fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom, we are all sinners, and we can all be easily distracted by the cares of this world, as well as by the good things of this life, but also by those things that appear to be pleasurable and enjoyable but which are actually spiritually harmful to us. So Jesus is calling us to be vigilant, to be prepared for his coming. And this is true wisdom.

The lighted lamps the virgins carry to welcome the bridegroom have been compared to good works, as it says in the Gospel of Matthew: “Let your light shine before all, that they may see your

good works." Remaining vigilant and preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord – who will come to each one of us individually and who has told us that we know neither the day nor the hour when he will come – means striving to lead lives of virtue, resisting the temptations that inevitably come as best we can, and doing good unto others. And the means by which we have the strength to do these things are of course always the same – faith in the Lord, prayer, receiving the sacraments. Asking the Lord in prayer to give us His wisdom so that we might always be ready for His coming, so that we will be able to rejoice with Him forever in the eternal wedding feast.

- **November 8, 2026 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**