



*Be ablaze with enthusiasm.  
Let us be an alive  
burning offering  
before the altar of God.*

*—Hildegard of Bingen*

## **TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 8 NOVEMBER 2020**

**Opening Sentences**—Psalm 78 from *Psalms for Praying* by Nan Merrill

Listen well, O peoples of the earth,  
to inner promptings of the Spirit;  
Let Silence enter your house that  
you may hear.

For within your heart Love speaks;  
not with words of deceit,  
but of spiritual truths to guide you  
upon the paths of peace.

### **Opening Prayer**

Holy Love:  
reveal yourself to me  
in my silence and in my prayers.

When my enthusiasm fades,  
renew my spirit.

When my imagination dims, my zeal weakens,  
kindle hope within me  
and open my eyes to love's possibilities.

When I am weary and fatigued,  
grant me space to rest in you.  
For in you is found true and everlasting life.

Be with and for me this day. Amen.

## Scripture Reading—Matthew 25:1–13

*Leaving behind the Exodus pilgrimage towards freedom and love and the pastoral message of Paul to the church in Philippi, we take up three parables in the Gospel according to Matthew for the final weeks of the church year. As we move towards the culmination of the church year on Reign of Christ Sunday (22 November), the scripture readings take on an urgent and challenging tone.*

*The tone of the readings for the next three weeks reflects something of the context in which the gospel was written. After the Jewish massacre and destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, a few remaining temple leaders and their followers fled to the city of Antioch. There a community quickly became the new centre for the remnants of the Hebrew faith. Among this Jewish contingent lived a budding group of Jesus' followers. Both groups were moving through a time of upheaval and suffering with the Christians turning to the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven for hope—a theme picked up in the parables.*

*Today's parable has some difficult elements. It can be tempting to focus on the details that we might find confronting but, as always, we are encouraged to listen with the ear of our heart for the good news in the Gospel. Towards this end, it might be helpful to contemplate the bridegroom image in the parable. Here, as Jesus speaks about last things, we discover not a condemning judge, the proverbial pointing finger, but a beloved coming to celebrate the consummation of all creation.*

*With this in mind, read slowly the parable. Ask yourself: **How is this good news for me today?***

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'

Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps

are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

## Going Deeper

As you contemplate the parable of the ten bridesmaids, where do you hear good news for yourself today?

The bridegroom's arrival at midnight is worth pondering. How often has the sacred come to us in surprising ways and times? Meister Eckhart says, "Truly, it is in the darkness that one finds the light, so when we are in sorrow, then this light is nearest of all to us."

- When have you experienced God in a time of darkness?
- What was this experience like?

The wise bridesmaids say they cannot give their oil to the foolish bridesmaids. This is just one of the disturbing aspects in the parable for it seems to go against the mercy, kindness, and sharing of love that Jesus seeks to promote. However, some say God has no grandchildren, only children. Each of us must do our own "work" within the Christian life. Insight, wisdom, and spiritual maturity cannot be passed on to another.

- How do you do the work of the Christian life? What practices help your love for God and others deepen and mature?
- Does this parable cast before you an invitation to be more intentional in some way?

The words at the end of the parable also sting: "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Let us remember that "know" in scripture often has the connotation of sexual intimacy. Given the context of the parable—bridegroom and wedding banquet—this is most certainly the case.

- What enables you to know and love God as you are known, especially amidst the routine and perhaps doldrum of life?

## Silent Meditation

*You might choose to spend some time in silent meditation  
away from thoughts and feelings, basking in God's love for you.*

How to meditate—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

To meditate, sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase, "Ma-ra-na-tha." Say it as four syllables of equal length.

Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything—spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning simply to saying the word.

## Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, the days lengthen and warm, gifting us with light and energy. We are grateful for the sense of new life many feel at this time. But still, the works of darkness remain in our world bringing hostility, injustice, and a lack of concern. Fill us with your love as we pray.

*Shine through us, O God.*

The shifting season causes extreme weather events around the globe. So, we pray for all who face destruction of property and loss of life, all who must rebuild in the midst of shock and grief. Help us to love and care for creation and our neighbours. Increase our compassion we pray.

*Shine through us, O God.*

Give us eyes to see beyond our own experience as we look to the continuing impact of the pandemic. We pray for those in hospital and those in hotel quarantine, those who are unemployed or underemployed, young people whose futures are just opening, for loved ones who are separated from each other, for scientists, medical workers, and leaders working overtime.

*Shine through us, O God.*

Finally, we hold in the light of your love the people and situations who are in our hearts at this time...

*Shine through us, O God.*

## Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

## Blessing—John O'Donohue

There is a quiet light that shines in every heart.  
It draws no attention to itself though it is always secretly there.  
It is what illuminates our minds to see beauty,  
our desire to seek possibility and our hearts to love life.  
Let us go forth to live in the strength of this light always.