瀬田の丘



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Today’s Word
The Thirty-second Sunday, Year A (8 November)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Wisdom 6:12－16
Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13－18
Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:1－13

Today’s Gospel reading is the passage containing the parable of the “Ten Virgins.” Let’s read it carefully while reflecting on it for a moment.

[Introduction: Unease with the Traditional Interpretation]
Ever since the time of the Church Fathers, the bridegroom has been understood to be Christ. Therefore, it is generally interpreted that the meaning of this parable is “Be prepared for the Second Coming.” In this reading, the oil represents faith and good deeds that are not shared with others, and the lamps are seen as the fire of the Holy Spirit. However, this turns a joyful story of a wedding feast into a tale of judgment and threats. I felt something didn’t quite sit right with me on this point, so I decided to reread this parable carefully from the beginning.

[Text and Background]
Many scholars view this parable as a creation of the early Church. Others believe it traces back to the actual words of Jesus. Nevertheless, scholars are almost unanimous in agreeing that the opening (verse 1) and the conclusion (verse 13) are additions made by Matthew. Nevertheless, let us accept it as the words of Jesus.

Marriage in Palestine at that time took place in two stages. In the second stage, the groom entered into a contract with the bride’s father, and once the contract was finalized, a procession set out from the bride’s home to the groom’s home, since the groom’s home was the venue for the wedding feast. The young women accompanied this procession, carrying lamps and singing and dancing.

[Vocabulary and Questions]
The “virgins” are friends of the bride, around 12－13 years old. Fulfilling their

role as attendants well was also an opportunity to demonstrate that they would make good brides.

“Lamps” (lampas) usually refer to torches, which burn for only about 15 minutes.
Question 1 (Scene): It would be unnatural for the oil to run out at the banquet hall or for someone to go out in the middle of the night to buy more. It is best to understand that the virgins were waiting at the bride’s house.
Question 2 (Reason for Not Sharing Oil): The wise virgins force their friends, dressed in their finest, out into the night streets. The “wisdom” required to fulfill their roles perfectly leads them to abandon those who cannot keep up. It almost seems as if we are seeing a microcosm of today’s competitive society in this.

The Biggest Question (Lack of Hospitality): The master who turns away an important guest by claiming not to “know” them goes against the traditions of the time, which valued hospitality. In this parable, there is no mutual aid among the virgins, no mediator, and not even the bride herself appears. It seems as though the “kindness” of the common people—who supported one another while living under Roman rule—is absent from this story.

[Summary: As a Parable of Paradox]
Verse 1 can also be translated as, “Consider the Kingdom of Heaven as being like this.” Read this way, it may have been a parable of paradox. Perhaps Jesus intended to ask his listeners, ″Doesn’t the coldness shown by the master and the ’wise’ bridesmaids leave you feeling uneasy?″ I suspect he wanted to convey something like this: ″You see, the kingdom of heaven operates in a way that is entirely different from the ways of this world. God is not the kind of being who welcomes only the ’wise’ bridesmaids while turning away the ’foolish’ ones. The banquet of the kingdom of heaven is a celebration that everyone is invited to enter.″

However, this may be a somewhat unconventional interpretation. That said, since November is also a time for reflecting on the end times, the traditional understanding—that we should strive to be “wise virgins” who keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning until the Second Coming—is also valid.