

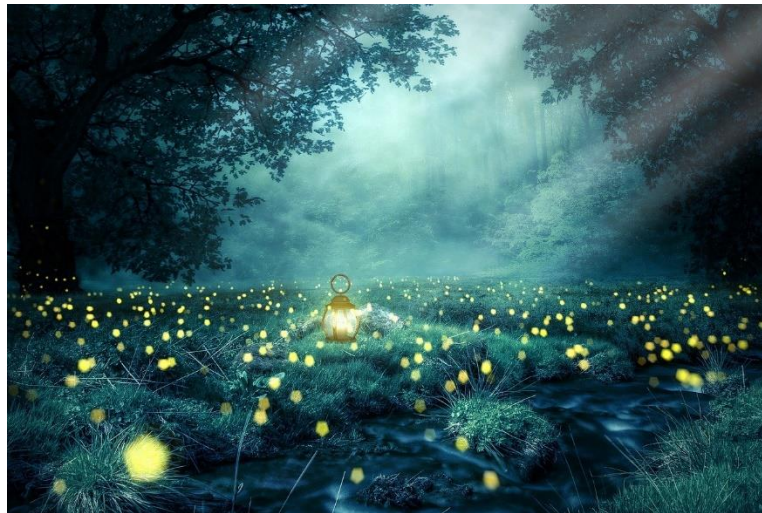
# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

12 November 2023



### Collect

Almighty and merciful God,  
graciously keep from us all adversity,  
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,  
we may pursue in freedom of heart  
the things that are yours.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

### Readings and Commentaries

“So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour”. For all the explosive growth in humanity’s knowledge of the cosmos, Jesus’ simple words are as true as ever. Scientists theorise about the universe expanding beyond control or alternatively collapsing into itself. But however plausible these hypotheses are from a scientific point of view, their astronomical time scale leaves the day and hour beyond our ken. The possibility of a human-induced catastrophe that brings life on earth to an end is much more plausible and proximate, but still uncertain.

Pope Francis urges us to hold together our belief in a glorious destiny for creation and our knowledge of the threats to its existence. He devotes three paragraphs of *Laudato si’* (199-201) to dialogue between religion and science. In his conclusion, he writes: “Even now we are journeying toward the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven . . . In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home that has been entrusted to us . . . Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of hope” (243-44).

**A reading from the book of Wisdom****6:12–16**

Wisdom is bright, and does not grow dim.  
 By those who love her she is readily seen,  
 and found by those who look for her.  
 Quick to anticipate those who desire her,  
 she makes herself known to them.  
 Watch for her early and you will have no trouble;  
 you will find her sitting at your gates.  
 Even to think about her is understanding fully grown;  
 be on the alert for her and anxiety will quickly leave you.  
 She herself walks about  
 looking for those who are worthy of her  
 and graciously shows herself to them as they go,  
 in every thought of theirs coming to meet them.

**First Reading**

The wisdom books of the Old Testament, such as Proverbs, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon, are the product of Israel's interface with the literature and culture of its Egyptian and Mesopotamian neighbours. They interweave Israel's faith tradition with the Greek wisdom and learning of the ancient world. The book of Wisdom may well be the most modern work in the Old Testament, probably originating in Egypt in the last decades before the birth of Christ. Its influence is evident in the gospel of John and in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

The short passage we hear today comes from a section of the book devoted to Solomon and his pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom is depicted as a woman ever on the lookout for seekers of wisdom and always ready to share her insights with them. Even to desire wisdom, the sage writes, is to find her and be blessed with her understanding. In brief, the key to the finding of wisdom is the desire to look for her. All else flows from this.

This teaching may sound simple, but it conveys a profound truth, as well as calling into question the value of knowledge not grounded in wisdom. This is a text to be delivered in a thoughtful, positive spirit, and at a moderate pace.

**Responsorial Psalm****Ps 62:2– 8**

**R.** My soul is thirsting for you O Lord my God.

O God, you are my God, for you I long;  
 for you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you  
 like a dry, weary land without water. **R.**

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary  
 to see your strength and your glory.

For your love is better than life,  
 my lips will speak your praise. **R.**

So I will bless you all my life,  
 in your name I will lift up my hands.  
 My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,  
 my mouth shall praise you with joy. **R.**

On my bed I remember you.

On you I muse through the night  
 for you have been my help;

in the shadow of your wings I rejoice. **R.**

**Responsorial Psalm**

Today's responsorial psalm, save for a minor variation in the fourth stanza, is the same as that for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year. On that day it appeared to contrast with the first reading; today it complements it.

The verses chosen for the responsorial psalm belie the fact that Psalm 62/63 is categorised as a lament. They convey a spirit of heartfelt longing for God, in parallel with the desire for Wisdom spoken of in the first reading. The psalmist appears peaceful, trusting and grateful. There is just the slightest hint in the first line of the final stanza that there has been trouble: "For you have been my help".

As it stands, the psalm invites us to permit ourselves, like the psalmist, to be positively captivated by God. It's meant to awaken in us a longing for God akin to a desert thirsting for water. It encourages us with the promise of a banquet and the assurance of God's saving help. Readers who make the psalmist's yearning for God their own will confer a blessing on the community.

**A reading from the second letter of  
St Paul to the Thessalonians**

**4:13–18**

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have died, to make sure that you do not grieve about them, like the other people who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus: God will bring them with him. [We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that any of us who are left alive until the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have died. At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command and the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then those of us who are still alive will be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. So we shall stay with the Lord for ever. With such thoughts as these you should comfort one another.]

*[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]*

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Matthew**

**25:1–13**

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: '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 sensible: the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him." At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other bridesmaids arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "I tell you solemnly, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.'

**Second Reading**

In this fourth excerpt from 1 Thessalonians Paul addresses the key issue troubling the community. Paul himself seems to have shared the Thessalonians' expectation that Christ would return in their lifetime and raise them up to eternal glory. On the basis of this belief, they would not suffer death. What, then, was the fate of those who had already died? Were they to miss out on eternal life?

Paul insists that those who had already died would suffer no disadvantage; they would be raised, and all believers, whether living or dead, would "stay with the Lord for ever". He does not allude to the possibility that he and others might themselves die before Christ's return. Nor has any text been found that spells out "the Lord's own teaching" to which Paul refers.

The description of the parousia has imperial overtones. Christ is identified as Lord, and the trumpet sounds to herald his return as it would announce the ruler's arrival. On the other hand, the description Paul gives of the raising of the dead draws on Jewish apocalyptic imagery. The lectionary offers a shorter option of the reading that omits this spatial depiction of the gathering up of the saints.

The dilemma facing the Thessalonians is no longer ours. The challenge for contemporary believers is to maintain a lively faith in and hope for the time when "we shall stay with the Lord for ever". Well read, this teaching of Paul's will help us "comfort one another".

**Gospel**

The gospel for each of the final three Sundays of the Church's year features a parable focussed on the end-time. Today's is variously called that of the ten virgins, bridesmaids or wedding attendants. It's unique to Matthew. In brief, the ten maidens are assembled to welcome the bride and groom on their return from the wedding. Time passes, they fall asleep, and when awakened find they need to replenish their lamps. Five have wisely anticipated this eventuality, five have not. By the time the latter come back, the door is closed and they are excluded from the wedding feast. In spite of the injunction to "stay awake," given that all ten fall asleep, the real message is the need for preparedness.

The contrast between wisdom and folly is a common biblical theme. It's dealt with at length in the first nine chapters of Proverbs which eventually personify them as Dame Wisdom and Dame Folly. It also appears in the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 7: 24–27). Just prior to that, Jesus dismisses those who cry "Lord, Lord" and expect to be saved, just as do the five foolish women.

The parable itself makes no explicit reference to the event for which Jesus himself is on high alert, his imminent betrayal and rejection, but it's implicit in the place Matthew has given it, so close to the passion narrative. In spite of this, the parable still invites us to imagine the coming reign of God as a joyous wedding banquet, and this should not be lost sight of.

## Concluding Prayer

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

**Amen.**

May he let his face shine upon us  
and show us his mercy.

**Amen.**

May he turn his countenance towards us  
and give us his peace.

**Amen.**

And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

**Amen.**

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time I, Roman Missal p 714)

