



a Kendall Hunt Company

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Wisdom 6:12-16

Psalm 63:1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [or (short form) 4:13-14]

Matthew 25:1-13

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger
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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Lectionary assigns texts which in some way are connected to eschatological themes. This is certainly the reason why 1 Thessalonians is placed in this period of time. It is also behind the selection of today's gospel reading from Matthew's Eschatological Discourse (23:1-25:46). The choice of Wisdom today is dictated by its relationship with the gospel reading. The Book of Wisdom, attributed to Solomon, was composed sometime in the first half of the first century before Christ by an anonymous Jewish author in Alexandria, Egypt. It is thus the last of the Old Testament scriptures to be

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written. Wisdom does not appear in the Hebrew or Protestant canon.

Today's selection is part of a section in which Solomon is purportedly giving advice to other rulers ("Hear, therefore, kings, and understand," 6:1). He tells them to seek Wisdom and they will not be disappointed ("She is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her," v. 12). In fact, Wisdom herself seeks out those who are looking for her ("she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her," v. 16). There are two ideas here: the notion of vigilance for one who comes and the idea of actively seeking out the good. Both are important recurring themes of Jewish and Christian eschatology.

Psalm 63 represents the motif of longing for God in one of its most classic expressions. The author's search for God has been satisfied and he rests secure in God's presence. The psalm, in a sense, demonstrates the truth of what the first reading has proclaimed—that those who seek God's Wisdom will not be disappointed. The connection to today's suggested doctrinal focus on perseverance in prayer is not hard to see.

The parable in today's gospel is unique to Matthew. In its earliest form, it was probably a simple story that Jesus told to reinforce the fact that some are ready to accept the reign of God and others are not. In the course of its oral transmission by the Christian community and in Matthew's use of it in the plan of his gospel, the parable has been highly allegorized and given a strong eschatological orientation. The wedding feast has become the messianic banquet, the coming of the bridegroom (Christ) represents the parousia with its sudden, unexpected quality, the wise and foolish virgins could be Christians and Jews or perhaps vigilant and lax members of Matthew's community. In its present form, the parable is a strong statement warning of the importance of vigilance, perseverance in prayerful watchfulness, and living in a state of readiness for the Lord's coming.

Catholic Doctrine

Perseverance in Prayer

The relationship that exists between God and us requires expression. Prayer is the link between ourselves and the divine, a vital necessity (CCC 2744). Prayer is also a gift which is

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sustained by the Holy Spirit. But there is much in this world and our lives that draws us away from this vital activity.

Catholic tradition understands that, no matter the form of our prayer, whether it is vocalized in personal or liturgical style, whether it is meditation or whether it is contemplation, our attempt at prayer can be sidelined by innumerable distractions. Oddly enough, to attempt to root out these distractions can be to fall into the ultimate trap, for by giving credence to the distractions one falls prey to their allure. The best remedy in avoiding distractions is to turn further into the depths of one's heart, for there, in that most intimate place, is where God speaks to us (CCC 2729).

Another difficulty that our Catholic tradition warns against in the life of prayer is inner dryness. This type of barrenness is described as the experience where nothing "works" in prayer, where the person praying feels separated from God. Neither in one's thoughts, nor in one's memories, nor in one's feelings is there any inkling of God's intimate presence. This lack of presence prompts one to ask where God is. This experience is the penultimate moment of faith. Even Jesus experienced such an episode in his agony in the garden. It is the experience of the tomb where the Lord was laid to rest. It requires the faithful heart throwing itself totally upon the God of conversion, who alone will vindicate and transform it (CCC 2731).

Given these difficulties in prayer, why do we Catholics believe that we should continue to pray to God, indeed, to never stop our attempts at communicating in prayer? There are several responses to this question:

First, we persevere because we are enjoined to do so by the gospel, by the letters of St. Paul, and indeed by the whole scriptural witness and the unbroken tradition of the Church expressed in the lives of the saints and the teachings of the magisterium. All of these sources assure us that God desires our communication. God wants us to pray. As in any relationship, we must always continue to attempt to express ourselves in our relationship with God, to communicate. Whatever form that communication takes, it nourishes the relationship. Without it the relationship dies. This does not mean that if we stop expressing ourselves to God in prayer that God stops loving us or that the relationship ceases. It simply means that our link, our cooperation with God, withers and is hampered (CCC 2738).



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Second, we persevere so as to purify our motives in praying and, so, deepen our devotion to God, who alone deserves all our love. For example, one particular type of prayer—the prayer of petition or intercession—asks God for certain good things to be accomplished or realized, such as the health of a loved one. When someone we love does not regain health and instead worsens or dies, sometimes we stop praying. The problem is, have we been asking in prayer for what is best or has God answered our prayers in ways that we cannot currently perceive? (CCC 2735) The ultimate prayer is simply surrender in trust to God, no matter what transpires here and now, even the cross.

In the Catholic tradition, prayer is not a manipulation of God. It is an expression of our mutual thirst, God for us and us for God (CCC 2560). It is a form of vigilance against the darkness and evil of the world (CCC 2612). Prayer is the self-expression of a heart attuned to the love of the divine, responding to that gift of heaven, not from the height of pride but from the depth, the font of humility (CCC 2559). Prayer is our communion with the one who has made life possible for us in Christ (CCC 2565).

