

## *Oil Enough*

“What is our life? It is like a vapor, which disappears in a little wind and is no more. Everyone knows that they are dying; but the deception of many is that death is so distant, as if it would never come. Death is coming to us sooner than a runner, and we run to death every moment. In every step, in every breath we approach death.” That is a quote by St. Alphonsus de’ Ligouri in his book *Preparation for Death*.

Every November, Catholics remember death. This is how we end the Church year. We pray for the dead, and we prepare for our own death. In every breath we approach death. Are you ready to meet your Maker?

The Scripture readings have the same focus. For the next three Sundays we read from Matthew 25, the last chapter before Jesus’ passion and death. Matthew offers three parables on preparing for the Last Judgment. The parables remind us that Jesus will return at any time, and we will have to render an account of our lives. We run to death at every moment. Are you ready for the Last Judgment?

I am not only asking the older people, but young people. Today we celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with two teenagers. Confirmation will help Sabrey and Samantha live with a sense of being guided by the Holy Spirit. God blesses them with his Spirit so that they shine with his light.

Confirmation reminds each of us that we are gifted for stewardship. God graciously fills us with all the gifts that flow from the Holy Spirit, but we must be stewards who serve others with our talents. At the Last Judgment, we will be examined on how well we have used our gifts for the good of others. As St. John of the Cross said, “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love” (CCC 1022).

We will also be judged on our wisdom. In this Sunday’s parable (Mt. 25:1-13), the wise virgins have oil in their lamps, while the foolish virgins run out of oil. If your lamp does not have enough oil, then you are in big trouble. The door to the wedding feast of heaven will be locked, and you will be standing outside. Eternal destiny is at stake! By the way, in the parable the Greek word for the foolish is “moron.” Here, being a moron means to lose out on heaven.

What does it mean to be a wise virgin with oil in your lamp? Earlier in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus contrasts the wise and the foolish. He said, **“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock . . . But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand”** (Mt. 7:24, 26). The wise person acts on Jesus’ words.

Wisdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To be wise is more than knowing the mind of God. It includes doing the will of God. The wise virgin with oil for her lamp is a faithful disciple. We need to have enough oil to burn all night long. A good supply of oil means that you have a strong spiritual life. You have oil in reserve for a pandemic, or a bout of cancer, or even martyrdom.

Samantha chose St. Agatha as her Confirmation saint. Agatha consecrated her life to Christ when she was 15 years old. But she was very beautiful, and a Roman official wanted to marry her. When she refused his advances, he sentenced her to prison, then he had her tortured on the rack, and subjected her to other cruel and horrible tortures. She was martyred as a 20-year-old.

To marry the Roman official would have likely involved renouncing her faith. She is known as a virgin martyr. But she witnessed to something more than virginity. She defied the authority of

the Roman empire because of her love for Christ. She had enough oil in her lamp to die for Christ.

Sabrey chose St. Catherine of Bologna who wrote a short book titled *The Seven Spiritual Weapons*. These weapons show us how to store up oil for our lamps. The first spiritual weapon is zeal or solicitude in doing good, which she contrasts with being lukewarm in the way of God. Zeal for doing good is opposed to being selfish and doing whatever feels good for me. It is being other-centered, not self-centered. Basically, it is living each day with the purpose of serving others. This is one way of storing up oil. As Jesus said to the disciples, ***“Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father”*** (Mt. 5:16).

The second spiritual weapon is mistrust of self, or to believe firmly that one cannot do good by yourself, as Jesus said, ***“Without me you can do nothing”*** (Jn. 15:5). St. Catherine balances zeal for doing good with total reliance on Christ to do good. We can only store up oil by staying close to Christ who anoints us with the oil of his Spirit in Confirmation. Sabrey and Samantha, be strong in your prayer. Rely on Jesus to fill you with his grace to love others. Without him you can do nothing.

The fifth weapon is to remind oneself that we must die. Always stand ready for death. This means to remember that we are stewards who own nothing. Rather, everything is a gift from God, and we will be required to give an accounting before the Lord of how we have used our talents for the good of others.

Finally, we cannot share our oil with others because it symbolizes our lived relationship with God. It is not that the wise virgins are selfish with their oil when they do not give any to the foolish virgins. This oil cannot be shared. It is what each of us will bring to the Last Judgment, when we stand before God to give an accounting of our lives. “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love.” Do you have enough oil?