

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The parable of the sheep and the goats is a parable about the nations. It is a parable about the final separation of the Church from the world. At His Coming, all the dead will rise, good and bad. They will all stand before the Lord, the Judge. And He will divide the Church from the world.

In the very same chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, the Lord speaks of another division of the faithful from the unbelieving. He speaks the parable of the Ten Virgins. They too are to be distinguished, just as are the sheep and the goats. They too are very different, and that difference will be clearly seen when the Lord comes, at the resurrection of all flesh.

The parable of the Ten Virgins is not a parable about the nations. It is about the visible church on earth. The ten virgins in the parable count themselves to be Christians. But not all are what they seem to be. Not all are what they claim to be. They may have deceived others. They may have even deceived themselves. But they could not deceive God.

The One, Holy catholic and Apostolic Church awaits the coming of Her Lord. He is the Bridegroom. The Church is His Betrothed, His Chaste, Holy Bride, awaiting His return. All ten virgins in the Lord's parable seem to do what the True Church does – they go out to meet the Bridegroom.

But all ten are not the same. Five are wise. Five are foolish. The Apostle writes that Christ is the Wisdom of God - to have Christ is to have wisdom. When the Word of Christ dwells richly in you, you have wisdom. To believe in Him is to believe His Word, to believe the Holy Gospel. To believe is to have faith worked through the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. To have that faith, to believe in Christ as your Lord and Savior, is to be wise - wise unto salvation.

So he who has ears, let him hear. The foolish virgins took their lamps and took no oil with them. The wise virgins took oil in their vessels with their lamps. No man can see faith. But the works of faith, the works wrought by the Holy Spirit in those who have the saving faith that God alone can give, those works are outwardly visible. So by the light of their lamps you will know them.

What good is an empty lamp at night? What purpose can a darkened lamp serve? How foolish one would have to be to allow their lamp to be empty when they knew it would soon be needed! And yet that foolishness is common among fallen men. It is the foolishness of sin, the foolishness of unbelief, the foolishness that counts the Christian faith as something external, a pietistic display. It is of those who want to be considered something that they are not.

The visible church, the church seen with fleshly eyes, is made up of believers and unbelievers. So while the true church wars against the world, those wars rage inside of the visible church as well. The darkness of unbelief, the empty lamps of the faithless, is seen visibly as those who call themselves Christians do what no true Christian could ever do.

Every sin that men commit, every sin that you have committed, has been an act of unbelief - an act of darkness, proof of a darkened lamp, as obvious to God as a lamp in darkness that will not light. So it is that among those who do not believe and yet would be called Christian that the

Word of God is forsaken, and the fallen reason and the sinful desires of corrupt men supplant the very Word on which the True Church stands.

The surety of our Lord's return, for He will come as He promised, motivates the faithful to be ready. We long for His return. We daily prepare for it. But those without faith carry on as if the Lord will never return. They willfully allow their lamps to be empty. They appear to be ready on the outside, but when their lamps are needed, they avail nothing. They were empty all along.

And soon they will be exposed. For the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. Then sudden destruction comes upon them, ... And they shall not escape, as God promises through His Prophet. To them will the Lord say through locked door: "I do not know you."

So be ready. The Lord comes, and that soon. In love He works faith in you who are His True Church. By the Word of God, by the Holy Spirit, fallen, sinful, empty men are converted, men like you. Your sins are forgiven in the Blood of Christ. In grace, your lamps are filled with faith – saving faith in Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and rose for your justification.

In love, our Lord gives the blessed oil of faith to His Church, to you, O Redeemed of Christ; to you, O you who believe in Him. And so it is that the faith in which you lie down, the faith in which you slumber, will be the faith in which you rise, that at His coming your lamp burn bright.

Hearken, then, to the Word of the Prophet: "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.'" You, dear Christians, are "all sons of light and sons of the day." For "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

Believing, your vessel is full, for in grace God makes your body the temple of the Holy Spirit. Believing, your lamp is full, full of faith, faith which reflects the Light of Christ. That Light even death cannot dim, for He has conquered death for you. And when the Bridegroom comes, even if you sleep the sleep of physical death, your lamp will burn bright as that midnight cry is heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' As He rose, so too will you rise.

Then you who have the readiness only faith can give, you will go with Him into the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end, you His Blood bought Bride, He, your Divine Bridegroom. And that you be strengthened and sustained until that day, He bids you fill your vessel. He gives you a taste of that heavenly feast as He makes His Body your Food and His Blood your drink.

You partake of the Holy Meal that fills you with the oil of faith. You partake of the Holy Meal that unites you to Christ, to His Holy Church, and to the beloved who have gone before us with the sign of faith. He unites you to the Church in Glory, the Church Victorious, to which you will be added at His appearing.

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."