

**HERE IS THE BRIDEGROOM! COME OUT TO MEET HIM!**

**Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Matthew, 25, 1-13**

*“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”*

Matthew's gospel chapter 5 opens with the last of the five discourses that concern his work, relating to the five books of the law believed to be written by Moses. Well, this chapter contains the last time in which the evangelist speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven which, it must be remembered, means the Kingdom of God. And the evangelist does it by reconnecting this sermon of the Kingdom of Heaven with this parable, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in chapter 7, 21 . In particular when Jesus says that *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ it is not enough to be in communion with him, but who collaborates in the works of the Father, “...the one who does the will of my Father...”* And Jesus had concluded the Sermon on the Mountain with the image of a foolish man who goes to build the house on the sand and during the bad weather the house collapses, and the wise, intelligent man who instead builds his house on the rock. It was an image of those who listen to his word, but then do not put it into practice and therefore their lives go to ruin, and those who listen to his word and then practice it. So let's read chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel.

*“Then..”* the evangelist is connected to the coming of the Lord in his manifestations in human history *“.. the kingdom of heaven..”* which means the alternative society that Jesus came to realize *“..will be like ten virgins..”* meaning girls not yet married, but of the age to marry *“.. who took their lamps..”* by lamps we do not mean the small lamps for domestic use, but here we are talking about torches *“.. and went to meet the bridegroom.”* an image of God, from the prophet Hosea onwards, he was the bridegroom and his people the bride. *“Five of them were foolish..”* and here the evangelist uses the same words that Jesus used at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, about the foolish man building his house on sand and it collapsed *“..and five were wise.”* Wise like the man who built his house on rock.

*“For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept.”* It is not a

question of vigilance because they all fall asleep, but it is a question of having the ability or not to meet ‘ the groom.’

“ *But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’*” here Jesus does not refer to the matrimonial uses of the time, but actually reverses them, because it was not the girls who were going to meet the bridegroom, but it was the bride who, accompanied by her friends, entered the bridegroom’s house. Why this diversity? Precisely to attract the attention of the audience. “*Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.*” but here there is a problem “*And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’*” it may seem strange now the negative answer of the wise ones who say. ‘*Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.*’ but they act with rationality because it is better that a few go with the lamps to meet the groom, rather than many in darkness. So this oil represents something that everyone can have, but that it cannot be loaned which we will understand later on

“*And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came,..*” the evangelist gives us the image of the wedding meeting, the believer's life is not made up of painful sacrifices, but is a crescendo of joy in the relationship with the groom, “*..and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.*” this too is another inconsistency. At the marriage feast the whole town was invited and the doors were never closed, but the evangelist follows these oddities to attract the attention of the audience, and in fact it refers to what Jesus had expressed at end of the Sermon on the Mount.

“*Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’* exactly like those who shouted “*Lord, lord*” (Matt.7, 22) and the Lord says I don't know you, and he had told them “*I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness*”, literally builders of nothing. Belief is not enough, the certificate of orthodoxy is not enough, fidelity to doctrine is not enough, the Lord asks us to be collaborators in his creative works and his creative works are done by communicating life. This is the image of this oil. In the gospel, always in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus will say “*..let your light shine before others, so that<sup>b</sup> they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” (Matt.5,16) So, this light, this oil that gives light are the good works and good works cannot be lent to another, either they exist or don’t exist.

So here the bridegroom replies exactly like Jesus to the workers of lawlessness (Matt 7,23) “*..he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.*” Jesus, the Lord, does not know who has a relationship with him based on orthodoxy, on certificates of fidelity, but who with this orthodoxy and certificates of fidelity translates them into fully human attitudes, meeting needs and requirements, to the sufferings of others.

And then the final invite “*Watch therefore,...*” Here, keeping watch does not mean staying awake at night because in fact everyone is asleep, but it means being fully aware and attentive to what is happening, living fully any moment of one's life to be able to collaborate in the creative works of the Lord.

