

- I. In a few weeks we will be celebrating the 250 anniversary of the New Church.
 - A. When the Lord was on earth He told people He would come again, and in fact much of His teaching at the end of His life was about that promised coming
 - B. The parable we read today was one of those teachings, and follows a theme in the gospel of Matthew about the Lord's coming involving a separation of those who are ready and those who are not – those with oil and those without, sheep from goats, those who had used their talents wisely
 - C. In all His parables the Lord peels back the layers, as it were, and shows us what is most important to Him, what separates sheep from goats. They share much in common, but it is what distinguishes them that matters.
 - D. Today we'll go through this parable, and although we'll talk about the historic symbolism – the way this parable applies to the New Church's birthday – I want to focus on how it applies to the Lord's coming into our lives today.
 - E. Every one of us is capable of our own personal second comings when we wake up to the Lord's presence and power in our lives in a new and living way
 - F. It is one thing to know that we should be good people and try to do what's right; it is another entirely to enter in to a joyful marriage celebration in which the Lord is personally present and active in our lives in a way we recognize.
- II. Let's look first at this story in its historic setting because it is describing the end of an era, an era in which Christianity embraced salvation by faith apart from living a good life
 - A. Just before the parable, and at its end, we find a similar phrase, "Watch therefore, because you do not know the day, nor the hour, in which the Son of Man comes"
 - B. It is clearly a warning to look to what is going on with us lest we be unprepared when the time comes
 - C. Sort of like the phrase live each day like it's your last
 - D. This reflects the strong teaching in Scripture and New Church teaching that it is the pattern of your life that forms your spiritual character
 - E. And the warning to watch means to pay attention – look at your life, pay attention to what is going on.
- III. We start with 10 virgins, 5 wise, 5 foolish
 - A. Virgins, unmarried women looking to marriage, symbolize an affection for goodness and truth (AC 3081), and affection which makes us part of the church (AC 4638)
 1. These are the people who want to belong & are trying to get to heaven
 2. You can think of young women going to a wedding feast, hopeful that one day soon they too will be experiencing that celebration themselves, and you get an idea of the kind of affection being described. It is a yearning for a marriage of goodness and truth
 - B. These virgins had oil lamps. Lamps give light when they are filled with oil
 1. Similarly those in the church are filled with spiritual light when they

- approach the Word from love and seek to do what it says
2. The wise one are those who genuinely love the truth because they live what it says. The foolish are those who don't love to do the truth, but merely to possess it. People who believe that you are saved by faith alone apart from life have a lamp but no oil in reserve
 - a. But notice that they had oil to start. Both kinds of people look the same in everyday life. It seems like both approaches work
- C. They wait for a long time, which stands for being inattentive to spiritual matters
 - D. But at midnight the bridegroom – clearly the Lord here – came, and only the wise virgins were invited into heaven, symbolized by the wedding feast
 - E. The foolish ones asked to borrow oil, but the wise ones would not lend lest they ran out
 1. This describes a simple reality, namely that we cannot get to heaven on the coattails of someone else
 2. Heaven is opened to us by love – not by what we know, but by what we are willing to put into practice from desire. That is who we are
 3. So when the bridegroom says “I do not know you” to the foolish virgins, it symbolizes the Lord’s saying, in effect, “You have no goodness in you that can receive Me.” (AC 4638:5-6, 9)
 4. He is always standing at the door and knocking, but we have to open the door by our lives – we have to be willing to receive Him
 - F. And the parable ends with that statement: “Watch therefore, because you do not know the day, nor the hour, in which the Son of Man comes”
 1. It’s a warning in the literal meaning, but what it describes is a state of watchfulness the Lord wants us to have. He want us to be “eager” in our search for the Lord in our lives, and those who are eager are the ones who have open hearts
- IV. This parable, then, is a clear statement that people, and in the context of the Last Judgment, churches, who don't focus on putting oil in their lamps, who don't teach and live what the Lord says, will be in trouble, whereas those who are ready will be received joyfully into heaven.
- V. Let's shift, now, and consider this story as it applies to each of us today
- A. We are those ten virgins
 - B. We have parts of us that yearn to do what the Lord says, that have oil in their lamps, and we have other parts that perhaps enjoy knowing more than others or being more smart, canny, practical, or whatever it is we fall prey to
 1. The part of us that can say, “I know I should” about something but not feel too bad if we don't get to it
 - C. We are called to the marriage supper of the lamb, the place where goodness and truth are truly married in us, where we become the Lord's bride
 - D. And we know there are parts that know a lot but simply don't care very much. Maybe in those parts we enjoy feeling superior to others who have different beliefs, or ethnicity, or political opinion from us, or who raise their children

differently, or whatever it may be

- E. The task of our lives is to work to diminish the foolish part of us and to enhance the wise part
- VI. And here's a hard part of this: it takes time.
- A. You can imagine the young women coming to the wedding feast eager to be there, but while the bridegroom delayed, they fell asleep. That was quite a delay!
 - B. This nighttime of sleepiness describes a time of doubt in us
 - C. All of us hope for certain things: to become more patient, more compassionate, more fiercely dedicated to some spiritual principle that inspires us
 - 1. We know we are not there yet, but we picture ourselves entering into the marriage feast in that area, we picture arriving at our goal & feeling peace
 - 2. And it takes a long time. There is delay, and darkness and sleepiness, which depicts that doubt, and our sinking back into trying to live from ourselves rather than from the Lord
 - D. The chapter before also had a story about a master delaying coming back, and the steward decided to beat the servants and live a prodigal drunken life
 - 1. All of us at times can put on our Sunday best and behave quite well
 - 2. So the Lord lets us go to sleep a bit, to notice our weaker moments, and to see the tendencies that are there
- VII. But then the Lord calls us; He wakes us up and we choose how to respond
- A. Sometimes we find we don't really care, so we abandon our Sunday best behavior, reverting back to what we'd really like to be
 - B. At other times we might be horrified at where we went to, and that would be like waking up when the Lord calls us and trimming our lamps
 - C. How we respond to failure, to doubt, to our proprial behavior, shows what's inside.
 - D. A passage speaking about this speaks about using doubt in an affirmative way, meaning using that doubt as a way of stopping to reflect before reaffirming that yes, indeed, we want to do what Lord says
 - E. You could look at our country's halting progress around racial justice. We abandoned slavery, but that didn't do it. We woke up and banned Jim Crow laws, but that's not doing it. Are we waking up again now to a new sense of justice in the face of recent injustice? Will there be oil in our lamps this time?
- VIII. When they woke up the foolish virgins wanted the wise to give them oil, but they would not.
- A. If oil is love, you would think that they would have been willing to share their oil, just as we would be willing to share our love with others
 - B. But the thrust of this request is not will you love me, but rather will you, from your desire, fix me. One teaching says that they express a "desire for that good to be communicated from others to their own empty truths, that is, to their own hollow faith. For those who are in the next life communicate to one another every spiritual or celestial thing they possess, though only through

good.”

- C. So this is saying I didn't study for the test can you take it for me?
 - D. I can't reason with my husband. Go talk to him and fix this quarrel
 - E. I'm not willing to read the Word unless it is inspiring. Please make it so.
 - F. This is abdicating responsibility for one's own actions.
- IX. The teaching about this goes on to say something very striking. The 5 virgins saying they could not share means that “no communication of [good] is possible because the small amount of good they have would be taken away from them. For in the next life, when good is communicated to those whose truths are devoid of good, *they take away good so to speak from those who do have it and then keep it to themselves*. They do not communicate it to others but defile it, which is why no good is communicated to them.”
- A. The selfish parts of us are joy-suckers. They suck the joy out of the good parts of us
 - 1. Haven't we experienced this when a negative attitude or self pitying thought torpedoed what was otherwise a very enjoyable evening? The desire to be made happy sucks spiritual joy out of the atmosphere
 - B. In fact New Church Teaching, in describing this, specifically refers to communities in the next life called communities of friendship and communities of interior friendship. These are communities of people who enjoy socializing and having a good time. They don't connect with what is good and true in others, but just with what is fun to be around (AC 4804), or with the fact that others agree with them (AC 4805)
 - 1. In each there is a self absorption that has the net effect of sucking the joy out of the situation and out of other people – it's all about me
 - 2. This is a lamp without oil person
 - C. Since we have both the wise and foolish virgin parts of us, we might ask what kinds of friends we are. Do we ally ourselves with what is good and true in others? Do we champion it in our relationships? When it comes to love, do we share love, or do we seek to draw love from others?
 - 1. I would guess all of us do both at different times.
 - 2. The part that will be spiritually successful is the part that seeks to nurture and share love with others. Not the part that is interested in being right, but the part that says, “I have a bit of love, and from that love I want to light a lamp of truth so that I can see share love by serving others
- X. The New Church's birthday comes soon and it is a reminder of the change of an era, when the Lord restored a focus on living what He teaches, on filling our lamps with oil.
- A. We aspire to many good and beautiful things, to a glorious marriage feast
 - B. We will go through periods of doubt and nighttime
 - C. We can use those times, that awareness of our failures, to renew our devotion to the Lord and His will.
 - D. That devotion involves lighting a lamp so we can see clearly how to love and serve those around us as the Lord would have us love.

Matt 25:1-13 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and came out to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were prudent, and five foolish. Those who were foolish, took their lamps, and did not take oil with them. And the prudent took oil in their vessels with their lamps. And while the Bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

And in the middle of the night there was a cry made, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes; come out to meet Him." Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, "Give us of your oil, because our lamps are extinguished." And the prudent answered, saying, "Not so, lest there not be sufficient for us and for you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves." But when they were gone to buy, the Bridegroom came; and those who were prepared went in with Him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

And afterwards the rest of the virgins also came, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." And He answered, saying, "Truly I say to you, I have not known you."

Watch therefore, because you do not know the day, nor the hour, in which the Son of Man comes.

AC 2338 Temptations involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation. The evil spirits who are present with a person at such times and who are the cause of temptation do all they can to infuse a negative outlook, but good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope and in the end strengthening an affirmative outlook. Consequently a person undergoing temptation hangs between a negative outlook and an affirmative outlook. Anyone who gives way in temptation remains in a doubting, and sinks into a negative, frame of mind, whereas one who overcomes still experiences feelings of doubt; yet he who allows himself to be filled with hope remains steadfastly in an affirmative outlook.

AC 2872 The freedom that exists in heaven originates in the Lord. All angels in heaven possess it. It goes, as has been stated, with love to the Lord and with mutual love, and so with an affection for what is good and true. The nature of this freedom becomes clear from the fact that everyone who possesses it communicates from inmost affection their own blessedness and happiness to another, and that to them it is also blessedness and happiness to be able to communicate these things. And because all the angels in heaven are like this, every angel is consequently the focal point of the forms of blessedness and happiness of all, and all are at the same time recipients of those of each individual. This communication itself is effected by the Lord by means of wondrous inflowings within a form beyond one's comprehension which is the heavenly form. This shows what heavenly freedom is and that it originates in the Lord alone.