Homily for the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026 Year A

For a long time, I could not accept that Gospel story we have just heard, because at first sight it appears that Christ is condoning the selfish behaviour of the wise virgins who would not share their oil with their sister virgins.

But that was not the real point of the story. The point of the story was to remind us of the prudent use of time and the opportunities that God gives to us. Time is God's most precious gift to us, but it is limited, and it is accountable. Those last words of Christ summed it up perfectly, 'Stay awake and watch, for you do not know the day or the hour'.

Part of our problem is that we are not alert. We are not alert to the preciousness of time, and the persistent passing of time: second after second falling behind us into eternity, time never to be seen again, and never to be relived.

The very passage of time dulls our senses as to its passing. The days slide into weeks, the weeks slip into months, and the months rush on into years. It is perhaps only at the onset of a serious illness or a death that we all pulled up short, and we ask ourselves, 'where did it all go, what have I done with it'?

The Greeks had two words to describe time, Kronos, meaning the moment by moment passing of time, and hence our word chronological, and Kairos, meaning a moment of opportunity, a decisive point in God's plan for us. I think perhaps that Christ's instruction to stay awake, and be alert, indicate His wish that we wake up to the fact that in God's gift of time every passing second of chronological time contains, in its own way, its own Kairos, that is, a decisive moment of opportunity.

The time that we are all allocated can be used or wasted; it can be squandered or sanctified. We cannot consciously live every moment of our lives with a ferocious intensity otherwise we would exhaust ourselves and probably curtail the length of our lives. But time is to be lived, consciously and purposely lived, and for that we need to strive for a degree of control over our time.

Far too often, through force of circumstances, time itself runs away with us. We are not the conscious masters of our own time that we think we are.

The person living in grinding poverty that must work hard all the hours that God sends to raise a large family, has no time to intellectualise about time; they finally fall into bed at night bone weary, and sleep comes at once. A whole day of their life has passed, and they have not been conscious of it. The bedridden invalid living alone in a council flat is conscious of every pain-filled lonely second that passes, especially in the early hours of the morning when sleep will not come. A whole day of their life has passed, and they have been all too conscious of every moment of it. Yet both of those lives are lived in the same 24 hours; one of conscious awareness, the other of conscious unawareness.

God's gift of time is an invitation to live each day in conscious awareness, alert and awake to its precious opportunities that will never come again. There are things to be done, things to be said, relationships to be formed and enriched, challenges to meet, trials to be endured, and life itself to be lived and enjoyed.

One of the Fathers of the Church said, 'The glory of God is man fully alive'. We may not be able to achieve many of those wonderful moments when we are 'fully alive', but to strive to live an 'awake life', a life of conscious awareness of the preciousness of time, is to be well on the way.

Time, and the span of our lives, is a God-given gift to grow in our knowledge and relationship to Him. If, like the foolish virgins, we neglect that opportunity, and we squander our time and do not sanctify it, then we too fail to fill our lamps with oil. When our time has run its course, and God calls us, we cannot then in desperation call upon the credit of other peoples' relationship with God to supplement the neglect and poverty of our own. The oil will not stretch that far, and things do not work that way.

No life is perfect, but it must be dreadful as death to be aware that time has mastered us, and not that we have mastered time.