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# Scripture notes – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 8th November 2026

Year A is winding towards its end, with the usual theme of the 'end time' – the Second Coming of Jesus. That dominates the reading for the next three weeks. Most years when the shops and ads are already pushing us towards celebrating Christmas, it is an effort to match the liturgy's mood, but in 2026 with horrifying wars, weather catastrophes, and a continued food or cost of living crisis in many places, the outlook is already 'apocalyptic'. Our task now is to remember that this is a time for Christian hope!

***Wisdom 6:12-16***

The book of Wisdom exists only in a Greek version, and likely was originally written in Greek; it is not in the most ancient Hebrew versions of the Bible and therefore is not accepted as part of the Bible by Jews and Protestant Christians. It appears to have been written in Egypt, in the city of Alexandria on the Mediterranean; where there was a thriving and educated Jewish community. Scholars estimate it to be written perhaps only a century before the time of Christ.

The time was one of increasing scientific knowledge and inquiry, and in a way strangely like our own time, many Jews were sceptical and questioning their faith. It is written in a traditional genre of 'Wisdom Literature' (like the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) and in certain passages like this one portrays wisdom as a woman, whom one seeks.

It is an interesting match for the later readings, that speak clearly about anticipating Jesus' coming. Why is this theme of seeking Lady Wisdom relevant to the return of the Lord? Are we to hear a foreshadowing of the wise maidens of the Gospel parable: if you are wise, you will seek Wisdom? Or should we 'watch for her, sitting at the gates' like the wise maidens watched and waited for the Bridegroom?

***Psalm 62:2-8***

The theme of 'looking or thirsting for God' follows well after the first reading and the word 'banquet' is a hint of the wedding celebration of the Gospel.

***1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, or 4:13-14***

St Paul reassures his early converts that death will not be the end of life, starting with comfort for those who have lost those they love. This has special relevance today as we see death numbers rising from conflicts around the world. Paul also wants them to have hope for their own resurrection. Behind his words is the belief of Christians (as we profess in the Creed at mass) that at some time this world and its time-frame will come to an end with Jesus' coming 'again'. At the early date of this Letter, the first Christians expected this to be very soon in their own lifetime. It would take some adjustment to realise that this end could be long delayed. We see some of that shift behind the Gospel, addressing the idea of 'delay'. We in our times, tend to go in an opposite direction: it has been so long we forget it will come, and instead we expect our own deaths first.

But it does have meaning for us as we draw near to Advent, and we begin to hear themes of the Lord's coming and preparing ourselves to receive Him. In selecting these readings as Advent draws near, the Catholic Church has paired these familiar themes of Paul's – the Lord is coming! We don't know when but we hope it's soon! – with the parable about the Bridegroom's coming the Gospel. Perhaps this shows us one way the Catholic Church has chosen to interpret Paul's expectations and to

manage the fervour that can be whipped up about a coming Apocalypse: yes, the Lord is 'coming soon' – at Christmas!

***Matthew 25:1-13***

And so the Gospel selection takes up the theme, giving us a parable about being ready for Christ's coming. Unlike the usual 'Kingdom of Heaven' comparisons, where we are told the Kingdom of Heaven is like something (a mustard seed, for example), this is directed to the future – it 'will be like'.

Nicholas King S.J. suggests that actually this is meant to be something of a comic scene – where are those maidens trudging off to in the middle of the night? Aren't all the shops shut? – and we are not meant to take the details too literally, or indeed too seriously. Certainly we don't know enough about the typical wedding ceremonies of the time to make rigid symbolism of what the oil stands for, for example, in the context of Christ's coming.

Instead, the general message seems clear, and arises in various points in the first three Gospels and Paul's letters: you do not know when the Lord is coming; so be ready.

Over the 2,000 years of Christian history, there have been frequent movements or even fads of people expecting the Second Coming soon – reading the signs of the times, or even claiming that they can reveal the day. Perhaps not only the Gospel authors but even Jesus himself are giving a wry piece of advice. Don't get caught up in seeing 'signs' of the Apocalypse in the horrors and atrocities of our day. Instead, make sure that you are living as Jesus would want you to live, in the here and now.

The shutting out the foolish from the banquet sounds harsh, but an earlier saying in Matthew (see 7:21-23), explains there are those who pretend to obey God, but have not really done so. When they call 'Lord, Lord', he replies, 'I do not know you' for they have not really responded to him. There is also a seeming oddity in that the final warning is 'stay awake' while the wise maidens have slept along with the foolish, a reminder that we do not try to fit in all the details of an illustrative story. The words are a general summary, fitting well the previous parable which we do not hear (24:45-51). They may have become a common

expression meaning ‘be ready’ – as we use them now, as well and say ‘Wake up’ meaning ‘pay attention’.

Do we just ‘pretend’ to be expecting Christ and doing what he commanded, or do our lives show we are really getting preparing to meet our Lord with rejoicing?

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***Suggestions for Prayer or Reflection***

I remember a jokey workplace poster I found funny: ‘Jesus is coming! Look busy!’

A few weeks out from Advent, however, we can begin to think about what it means to expect our Bridegroom, to celebrate him, and to ‘be ready’. How do we want to be found? And, however we are – do we expect to be joyful, or secretly feel guilty if we imagine him appearing? Does being ready to receive him mean we’ve been good girls and boys, as if Jesus was Santa Claus bringing us rewards depending on whether we’ve been naughty or nice? Or the boss we fear will turns up when we’ve been chatting instead of working hard (‘look busy!’)?

Or does it mean having an open and eager heart, accepting our inevitable weaknesses and failures but expecting the kind of accepting, welcoming, compassionate love he showed for the outcasts of his day? Or the welcome and cooked dinner he had for Peter and the disciples after his Resurrection, in John chapter 21? (John 21:9-14.)

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