

‘BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM COMES AT MIDNIGHT!’

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, we find the chilling PARABLE OF THE 10 VIRGINS. According to wedding customs at the time of our Lord, a groom was expected to go for his bride at her father’s house. Young maidens were assigned to meet the groom with burning lamps and escort him to the one he was to marry. Christ relates how 5 of these maidens took extra oil with them when they went to carry out this task, while the other 5 did not. The bridegroom was delayed and the virgins fell asleep, with the lamps burning.

Finally at midnight, the bridegroom arrived, and the 5 foolish virgins who were caught unprepared had to go out and purchase more oil. By the time they returned, they were shut out of the marriage feast, forced to hear the stinging words of the bridegroom: “Truly I say, I do not know you.”

This message is particularly appropriate for our consideration during Great Lent, THE SEASON OF REPENTANCE. A certain urgency is attached to the penitential process now, as we are warned that our lives can come to an end “in the twinkling of an eye.” Returning to God through CONFESSIO and CONTRITION, therefore, may be viewed as a perfect example of the wise saying: “Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” Indeed, tomorrow may never come!

It must be noted that in our Church, a special service – The Bridgroom Matins – is celebrated the first 3 evenings of Holy Week, stressing this important message: “Behold, the Bridgroom comes at midnight, blessed is the servant that He shall find watching. And unworthy is the servant whom He shall find heedless.”