

Gospel Connection - November 8

"The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps . . . "

Matthew 25: 1-13

Empty lanterns

So here he is in September: a first-year college student. Finally, out and living on his own. Mom and Dad no longer setting curfews or asking where he's going and who he's been with. He can come and go as he pleases. Yeah, he gets to class enough times to count. But suddenly — it's Thanksgiving! He returns to campus after the holiday break and realizes there are only two weeks left to the semester and there's that psychology paper to write that was assigned in September, a lab report for chemistry that he hasn't begun, and the spine of the history book that hasn't even been cracked. The excuses begin: *That professor is too demanding . . . Why do I have to take a writing course — I'm a business major . . . The instructor is so boring . . . The class meets too early . . .* And so on and so on. But the real issue is this: The kid's an empty lantern.

They don't hesitate to make their feelings known: *You've got to cut the budget. You're wasting taxpayers' money. That service isn't needed. You're giving our hard-earned tax dollars to lazy freeloaders. That crowd at Town Hall are all incompetent hacks.* But when a service *they* depend on is cut, when money for *their* child's school is no longer there, when *they* have to haul their own garbage every week to the town's trash disposal site, they're stunned. How could this happen? Easy. Empty lanterns.

She thought he was the one. The break-up was as surprising as it was devastating. But she expected him to take the lead, to understand her wants and expectations, and to make the sacrifices needed to make the relationship work. And for a long time, he did, rearranging his life to accommodate hers. But, as the saying goes, she was "in love with *being* in love" — and he came to realize that she was not in love with *him*. So one day he ended it, thanking her for the good times, hoping they could remain friends, but making it clear that it would be best if they went their separate ways. And she was left, stunned and hurt, with her empty lantern.

Jesus' parable of the foolish bridesmaids is often played out in our lives when we realize too late that our "lanterns" are empty of the "oil" of responsibility, gratitude, generosity, justice. Our inability to place the common good before our own, our failure to see how our actions affect others, our refusal to accept responsibility for one another extinguishes the light of hope that we thought would never go out. There's so much we want to do with our lives, but the struggle to make a living derails us from making a life, a life that is centered in the love of family and friends, in an awareness of God's loving presence in our midst, in a yearning to contribute to the greater good of all. Christ warns us not to fall into the trap of the five "foolish" bridesmaids who squander their time before the Bridegroom's arrival, but to embrace the wisdom of the five "wise" bridesmaids, trimming our "lamps" with the "oil" of mercy, generosity and forgiveness in the precious time we have until Christ's coming.