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There is an old story of a jester who sometimes made very wise utterances. One day, the jester had said something so foolish that the king, handing him a staff, said to him, 'take this, and keep it till you find a bigger fool than yourself'. Years later, the king was very ill and lay on his deathbed. His family, his servants and his courtiers stood round his bedside. The king addressing them said, 'I am about to leave you. I am going on a long journey never to return. So I have called you all to say "Goodbye". Then his jester stepped forward and addressing the king, said, 'Your Majesty, may I ask a question? When you journeyed abroad visiting your people, your heralds and servants always went before you making preparations for you. May I ask what preparations has your Majesty made for this long journey. 'Alas!' replied the king, 'I have made no preparations.' 'Then' said the jester, 'take this staff with you, for now I have found a bigger fool than myself.'

In Jesus's time Jewish weddings took place in the evening. After the wedding the bridesmaids would escort the bride to the groom's house but the groom himself would go to her parents' house to haggle over the dowry and he could be there quite a long time. When he emerged from the house the bridesmaids had to be ready with lighted torches to escort him to his house where his spouse was waiting.

Jesus used this familiar scene to teach us an important lesson. November is the month when we pray for the holy souls but we shouldn't neglect praying for our own soul that we will be ready to meet our maker when our time is up. The leaves are almost gone from the trees now, the end of the year is in sight. So too the church in relating to us the parable of the ten bridesmaids wants us to focus our minds on the last things. In a world of uncertainties, the one thing we can be sure of is death. We may not know the day or the hour but it is an appointment we

cannot cancel. Not preparing for it is the type of foolishness which Christ condemns in today's gospel. A foolish person in the bible is not someone who is intellectually challenged but one who lives his life in this world without reference to the next.

As faithful Christians we should be looking forward to meeting our loving Saviour. When St Theresa lay dying she said to the nuns gathered round her bed: 'I can see in the distance my heavenly bridegroom coming to take me home. If we are going to be ready for his arrival, the lamp we need to keep lit is our faith in Christ. At every baptism after the parents receive the lighted candle we say to them: 'may your baby keep the flame of faith alive in his/her heart. When the Lord comes again at the end of time, with lamps alight may he or she go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom? This light of faith can go out if it's not nourished with the oil of prayer and good works.

The foolish bridesmaids were locked out of the banquet – the Lord did not know them. In this life his door is always open to us. He is always ready to listen to heartfelt prayer so that we draw closer to him. When we meet him after this short life is over He will be no stranger to us or we to Him. He will welcome us home.