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Kings of old often had jesters to entertain them especially after banquets. One day, the jester said something so foolish that the king, handing him his staff, said, 'take this, and keep it till you find a bigger fool than yourself'. Years later the King lay on his deathbed. His family, his servants and courtiers stood nearby. The king addressing them said, 'I am about to leave on a long journey and will not return. So I have called you all to say "Goodbye" for the last time. Then his jester stepped forward and addressing the king, said, 'Your Majesty, when you journeyed abroad visiting your people, your servants always went before you making preparations. May I ask what preparations has your Majesty made for this journey. 'Alas!' replied the king, 'I've made none.' 'Then' said the jester, 'take this staff for now I have found a bigger fool than myself.'

In Jesus's time weddings took place in the evening. After the wedding was over the groom would go to his in-laws and haggle long and hard over the customary dowry. He could be there well into the night. When he eventually left the house the bridesmaids had to be ready with lighted torches to escort him to his own home. It was a kind of post-nuptial Jewish ceremonial in those days.

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. With their leaves gone, the trees look skeleton-like against the sky. The end of the year is in sight. So too the church wants us to focus our minds on the last things. In a world of uncertainties, the one thing we can be certain of is the arrival of the grim reaper. We may not know the day or the hour but it's an appointment we cannot cancel. In being unprepared for it, we stand in the shoes of those foolish bridesmaids. 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. The psalmist says, 'the fool says in his heart there is no God above'.

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 sense my heavenly bridegroom approaching 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 child keep the flame of faith alive in their heart. When the Lord comes again at the end of time, with lamps alight may they 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 works of love.

The foolish bridesmaids were excluded from the banquet – the Lord did not know them. In this life his door is always open to us so we can draw closer to Him in prayer. So when we meet him after this short life is over we will be no stranger to Him.