



***No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves***

In the year immediately following my ordination to the priesthood, I had a recurring dream several times a month. It usually came when I was tired, or overworked, or generally anxious about life in the parish I was serving. In the dream I would be preparing to preside at liturgy; actually the liturgy was beginning. Acolytes and choir were all ready and lined up and I could not get vested. Literally, I could not get my vestments on and it was getting later and later and my anxiety in the dream increased. It was a very frustrating dream to have repeating in a young cleric's life!

I discussed this dream with my spiritual director and eventually with a counselor who was a friend. I came to realize quickly that my fear of not being ready was based on a not-so-hidden feeling of inadequacy that I kept hidden beneath the everyday surface. I was able to overcome this anxiety and eventually the dream by prayerfully recognizing that God and God's church had provided me with everything I needed to be a good priest.

The parable of the Ten Bridesmaids in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel always represents to me this sinful attitude of scarcity, that somehow God won't provide for us if we are generous. The "wise" bridesmaids respond to the request of the "foolish" ones in the usually sinful trickle-down attitude prevalent in our society today.

Now we recognize that an important theme in Matthew's gospel is this notion of the immediacy of the Messiah's return; so the theme and literal admonition to be ready is clearly the primary focus of this gospel passage. However, in examining the parable from the lens of stewardship, we cannot ignore the lack of charity and generosity portrayed by those the tradition has consistently called "wise."

They may have been wise, but not faithful, at least in my prayerful consideration. In this journey of life, would we not want to encourage an understanding and attitude affirming that God has provided for what we need; that as we await the coming of the bridegroom - who is Jesus, the Christ - that there is in fact enough? Would we not want to encourage a wisdom and generosity that matches the grace and mercy of the bridegroom? Should we not live boldly in the confidence that we will never hear the words, "...Truly, I tell you I do not know you" (Matt 25:13)?

Yes, we know neither the day or the hour; we must, in fact, keep awake. And we must, in fact, live generous and giving lives, in full celebration that God has given us all we need and we won't run out.



*The Rt. Reverend  
Lawrence C. Provenzano  
Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island*

*Reflection Questions*

- How does the mentality of scarcity shape our lives?
- Do you trust that God will meet your needs?
- How is the practice of generosity an affirmation of faith?