PENTECOST 24 – November 8, 2926 – Fr. John Warfel

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead
We say this every Sunday
St. Paul believed that Jesus would come again to judge the world soon,
perhaps even during his own lifetime.
Paul was wrong

So were the first few generations after Paul
Many hoped that the Second Coming would come in time to save them
To save them from Roman persecution
From the lions
From public executions
But the Lord did not return

Every generation since the time of Paul has claimed-
To be the last generation
Listen to any TV evangelist
They all agree: Jesus is coming soon. And He's not happy.

Some even give us the date, which of course they keep revising
And the bottom line of their apocalyptic message is clear:
Get right with God before it's too late
Repent or perish
And this scare tactic works, well, sort of

But isn't it just a little presumptuous to think
That one's own generation is so special, or even so evil,
That God would decide to end God's ongoing Creation
During one's own lifetime?
Well, every generation has thought exactly that

Someday things will end, yes
Someday things will be complete
But in God's time, not our time

There is great danger in over-emphasizing the end-times
If we concentrate on the final days
If we put our hope in some great apocalyptic leveler
We ignore and neglect the present

We are given life one day at a time
Plan, yes; prepare for the future, by all means
But set your sights on God here, right now in our midst

Paul tells the Thessalonians that *when the Lord descends from heaven,*
We who are alive, those of us who are left
Will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air

Paul speaks of the *parousia,*
A Greek word meaning presence, arrival
Some Christians call this great future event The Rapture

But *parousia* is so much more
God's presence, God's arrival, God's Kingdom is **now**;
not sometime in the future
God does not want us to fucus exclusively on Judgment Day
God wants us to focus on now, the **here and now**

But what about the parable of the ten bridesmaids,
And the great warning at the end:
Keep awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour
This is not simply another apocalyptic parable
And it's not about sharing

Does it seem selfish to you that the 5 wise bridesmaids-
refuse to share their oil with the five foolish ones
The parable tells us that they refuse to share,
because if they shared, there would not be enough oil for everyone

Understandable, yes
But what if they couldn't have shared their oil even if they had wanted to
What if the fuel for the lamp's light isn't oil?

What if the fuel for the light is endurance,
Or perseverance or faith or hope,
What if the fuel for the light is experience;
Experience that comes from living each moment fully
Maybe the foolish ones simply came up short

Perhaps the foolish ones had squandered the time God had given them,
Perhaps they were sent back to learn the lessons they had missed or ignored
Sent back to the dealers for more fuel

While they were gone, the bridegroom came
And only the bridesmaids who were ready-
Went with him into the wedding banquet.

One profound nugget we can glean from this parable is this:

The bridegroom comes not just once
But at each and every moment

Christ comes to us with each breath, with each heartbeat,
From our first to our last and beyond
Some call this the eternal now

Honor each moment
Be good stewards of time
Relish God's presence in every moment
Don't set your sights on the last moment
Be here now and keep awake

Live fully
Love wastefully
Be everything that you can possibly be here, now, today

For we know neither the day or hour
When the God who is outside of time
Will gently come to tell us ***it's time.***
Not in judgment; but in invitation
Will we be ready to say yes?

This little light I'm gonna let it shine (sung)
This little light I'm gonna let it shine
This little light I'm gonna let it shine
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.