

**Homily**  
**November 6, 2011**  
**Diocese of Des Moines**  
**Centennial Celebration**

The story of the ten virgins seems concerned only with the end of time. In this interpretation, we are instructed to be ready, to have our lamps burning brightly so that we can welcome Christ, the Bridegroom. He comes to inaugurate the everlasting wedding feast with those who are prepared to respond to His invitation.

The present moment provides a more immediate perspective. We know the end time is approaching for each of us with every irreversible tick of the clock. In the now, we are called to be wise – to fill our lamps with oil to manifest the Christ who comes in these personal last times for each of us.

This parable is applicable as we celebrate our centennial. It enables us to see how those prominent in diocesan history filled their lamps with oil. You and I are inspired by their example to keep our lamps filled in order that Jesus – the Christ, be known and loved in our time.

Manifesting Jesus to the world is evangelization. Pope Paul VI said that “the Church exists to evangelize.” In all times and places the mission of the community of believers is to make Jesus present. We are his Body. But we question, how is this done?

The first step is to ask of ourselves what was asked of the Apostles by Jesus: “Who do you say that I am?” Answering for his companions, Peter blurted out “You are the Christ, you are the Son of the living God. You have the Words of life.” Does this same response tumble from our hearts and our lips with rock-solid conviction?

If so, it requires seriously following Jesus. His Gospel words become the inspiration of all activity. We change. We become poor in spirit. We are merciful. We are known as peacemakers. We become the good Samaritan oblivious to personal cost when reaching out to another in need. We become the good Father always welcoming the lost one, the prodigal son or daughter. We are the sinner touched by Jesus. We excitedly tell others so that they can come to believe for themselves.

Evangelization is allowing God’s word to capture us so that we become interchangeable with this word. We surrender our unique personal gifts to incorporate them into the Body of Christ. Through the food and drink of angels, the Body and Blood of Jesus, we grow in God’s ways.

Our forbears settled the 23 counties of Southwest Iowa. The German settlers cultivated the fertile hills and prairies into a harvest gold of corn, soybeans and hay. Irish pushed the railroads west opening the vast untamed. The Italians worked the coal mines, providing energy. They were joined by other ambitious folk of varied European heritage.

Each nationality brought a unique culture, spirit, music, dance and cuisine. Stabilizing their lives and generating courage in the face of challenge were faith and trust in Jesus. In him, they placed unflagging hope. Witness to hope emerged in the towering, cathedralesque churches of Shelby County in the prayers, novenas, and rosaries prayed by the Italians on Des Moines' Southside. The number of churches dedicated to St. Patrick assures us that the Irish made their mark in the faith.

Committed to being salt and light, religious men and women, priests and brothers in turn gave of their lives in service to the early settlers. At great personal sacrifice they established schools, hospitals and performed the outreach of Catholic Charities. Priests came from Belgium, Ireland, Germany, Italy and other European countries so that faith intertwined with language, tradition and culture might transition into the new setting of Southwest Iowa. The lamps of our ancestors and those who served them were kept full. They burned brightly introducing Jesus to the land we call home.

In the last decades, so many of you have been core to the development of our diocese. Wars, economic stress, droughts, floods, tornadoes, the farm crisis have all been survived with deep faith. With lamps filled with oil you enabled others to see the contours of the face of God, of Jesus, with its loving and supportive presence. We rejoice in these heroics and the perseverance of the giants of the past and present.

As we embrace the present and envision the future, the Church of Des Moines welcomes all in the age spectrum as well as all the diversity which blesses us. Lending optimism to our community is the young Church, so visibly and energetically represented by the contingent of young people with us today. We welcome you and value your spirit and love. On a trip from Moscow to Washington, D.C., a young Russian of 20 or so affirmed for me the witness of the young Church. Being agnostic or perhaps a searcher, when asked what he thinks of when he thinks of Christian believers, especially of his own age, he replied simply, "I think of hope."

The contemporary moment extends the diocesan history of welcoming the newcomer. Among the ethnics who have enriched us most recently are the Vietnamese, the Hispanic, the Lao, the Hmong, the Sudanese, the Eritrean and Iraqi. Sister Pat Scherer of St. Ambrose Cathedral is the Mother Theresa of Des Moines. She, ever equipped with a bright lamp, is the lead face of a welcoming community recognizing and serving Jesus in each person arriving from afar.

Our age faces the phenomenon of isms . . . materialism, relativism, hedonism, individualism, nihilism, each of which compromises the truth of the human person. The response called for by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI is the "New Evangelization." Attentive to making sure that we are first personally Evangelized as well as making sure the total Catholic community is evangelized, I offer two ways to respond to the challenge of the popes.

The first is to accept our individual role as a member of the Body of Christ which body is made present through you and me in our families and social relationships. Each of us is called to identify and exercise our unique gift as a member of that body. Especially is this true in our work and careers. Here we are called to witness to excellence, to service, to compassion, to integrity, to justice, to solidarity. We abide by the truth that every person is made in the image and likeness of God, has a transcendent destiny and is worthy of our love and respect without qualification.

Exemplification of this pervasive Christian attitude was brought home to me recently by the head of the United Nations mission in the Ivory Coast. He is a Catholic from Benin in West Africa. He said to me: "I work tirelessly for the good and for justice, Bishop, because I am firmly convinced of and committed to the reality of the "New Man" the "New Person" each redeemed by Christ and fully capable of living in the loving Spirit of God if so challenged."

The second aspect of New Evangelization is to exercise a prophetic voice, particularly so by a two pronged witness.

First, let us raise our voices as advocates of the inalienable, natural right to life of each individual from the moment of conception to natural death. You and I are privileged to proclaim such a culture of life.

Secondly, because each of our brothers and sisters in the human family is a child of the heavenly Father each is entitled to be accorded the dignity consistent with this identity. Let us provide for the basic needs of all through organized charity and solidarity. Moreover, social justice is an integral component of the Gospel. Through its implementation, we ensure the God-given dignity of each person. We thereby forge a system guaranteeing justice and making sure that the safeguards of human rights are institutionalized.

In the decree of Pope St. Pius X on August 12, 1911, establishing the Diocese of Des Moines, Mary, Queen, was named patroness of the diocese. Bolstered by her intercession the nine bishops who have served the diocese and all others who have contributed to its history regard Mary as the prototype of the wise virgin. Her lamp is always burning brightly in welcoming her Son, the bridegroom of the Church. She has been a singular force in molding the culture of evangelization that characterizes our diocesan community past, present and into the future. Today, we gratefully renew our trust in her. She opens the way to her son. May God continually bless our great diocese through Mary's intercession.