

**OPENING COLLECT**

Almighty Father, whose will is to restore all things in your beloved Son, the king of all: govern the hearts and minds of those in authority, and bring the families of the nations, divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin, to be subject to his just and gentle rule; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

**FIRST READING: Amos 5.18-24**

18 Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; 19 as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. 20 Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? 21 I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. 22 Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. 23 Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. 24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

‘The Day of the LORD’ is an important theme in Amos. For the people it is the day when God will act to bless them; for the C.8<sup>th</sup>. Prophet, it is the coming day of judgement, when God will punish his people for their failure to live the sort of life, which should mark them out as blessed by God, and so a source of blessing for the nations of the world. They were called to be an effective tool for the mission of God; a strong player in his plan of salvation (Gen.12.3). The prophet is critical of both their way of life and of their religious practice. They have clearly slipped into a formal way of keeping in touch with God and of hoping to keep their ‘noses clean’, but it is at the expense of a true relationship with him, which is reflected in their attitude to one another in society. They fail to ‘love God and love their neighbour’ (Lev.19.18 & Mt.22.34-40). God’s judgement is inevitable, as verse 19 makes clear, but perhaps v.23-4 offer a lifeline!

**SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18**

13 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are

Paul’s graphic description of the final judgement, and of resurrection to new life, needs little introduction! For those suffering persecution and in danger of dying before the end of the age, which they expected soon, there was a need to hang on to their hope of the next life. Here, Paul clearly thinks it will happen in the very near future, but by the time he came to write to the church in Thessalonica again, he had modified his view! See 2 Thess.2. We may not find an easy resonance with Paul’s confidence in the imminent coming of Christ and judgement, but, surely, we can share his conviction that, in life and in death, at all times, to be ‘in the Lord’ (or ‘in Christ’) is all important.

alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**Epistle continued:**

### **Gospel: Matthew 25.1-13**

Jesus spoke this parable to the disciples:

1 'The kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 9 But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." 12 But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.'

Following the apocalyptic chapter, from which we read last week, with its strong challenge to 'hold out to the end' (to keep the faith'), Matthew goes on to record some parables, which challenge his hearers to put themselves right with God, against the day of judgement. This week's parable, about the wise and foolish virgins, is, of course, well known. Its message is similar to that of the parable of the wedding feast, as handled by Luke (do not make excuses!), and the man who built a bigger and better barn for all his crops! Following on from Paul's emphasis on the immediacy of the end, in Thessalonians, the picture of the young ladies all getting drowsy is rather splendid, though why half of them came out without any oil is a mystery! The teaching, at any rate, is clear enough. 'Do not put off to tomorrow what you could perfectly well do today. Do not delay responding to the call of God for you to live the Kingdom life and to be involved in his mission! And, in so far as you can, be alert, keep awake, watch...

Leaving aside the timing of ultimate judgement, we are challenged and encouraged to be active now; to live the life of the Kingdom now, so that God's salvation will continue to reach to the ends of the earth (Mt.24.14).

#### **Post-Communion Collect:**

God of peace, whose Son Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom and restored the broken to wholeness of life: look with compassion on the anguish of the world, and by your healing power make whole both people and nations; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**