

Homily: 8th November 2020

33rd Sunday in OT Year A 2020

(1st: Prov 31:10-13.19-20.30-31; 2nd: 1 Thess 5:1-6; Matt 25:14-30)

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Most of us grew up with mum saying, ‘the devil finds work for idle hands.’ Me & my twin sister never said we were bored, as mum would soon have found work for us to be doing. You know I’m often saying ‘we’re better if we’re busy.’ Most acknowledge it to be true, and even in enforced lockdown, there is still plenty to get on with.

All the readings today emphasize this point; that we can never rest on our laurels, but that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works within us. God has invested in our lives and trusts us to make a profitable return. If our testing shows us faithful in small things he will trust us with more, and invite us to share in the master’s happiness.

The Catechism of our church on this says: *On coming into the world, we are not equipped with everything we need for developing our bodily and spiritual life. We need others. Differences appear tied to age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, the benefits derived from social commerce, and distribution of wealth. The talents are not distributed equally. These differences belong to God’s plan, who wills that each receive what they need from others, and that those endowed with particular talents share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practise generosity, kindness and sharing of goods; they foster the enrichment of culture.*

Our 1st reading from Proverbs tells of the perfect wife who is extolled for her industry and constant care of her household. It is a very positive picture. This wise woman is the heart of her household. She cares for all and oversees all. Her ways are kindness and tenderness. She attends to every human need and practical requirement. She has care for those outside her household, too, helping those who are poor. She is trustworthy, diligent and generous to all. In spiritual attitude and in practical concerns, this woman is the embodiment of wisdom. Last week’s reading was from the book of Wisdom. How we all need that, especially at the present time.

The Psalm tells us that the fear, which really means the sense of majesty and awesomeness of God is the beginning of a happy family life.

Writing to the Thessalonians in our 2nd reading, St Paul tells them directly not to be wasting their time wondering when the end of the world will come. Some thought it would almost be the next day, so they assumed they could sit back and wait for him! Paul disillusioned and challenged them to realise the wisdom they have been given in Jesus, the wisdom of God.

Paul, emphasizing first, that we cannot be certain when Christ will return; and even more vital, that we must work to fulfil his prayer ‘thy kingdom come,’ staying awake spiritually. That Jesus will come again we acclaim at every Mass: but we will never know the day or the hour.

I have always been quite drawn to Paul’s words and careful of saying ‘How peaceful and quiet it is, as it is so often the case, that suddenly then the worst happens.’ Who would have thought in early 2020 we would be where we are now?

We are to be concerned with how good use we make of the time we have. Seize each day, not desperately, but with determination to do some good each day. So many people live in the dark.

In the Gospel parable it is interesting that Jesus gives time, when he says ‘On his way abroad:’ a sufficient time for servants to multiply their master’s wealth.

In the biblical context of Jesus time, the delay between his ascension and God’s judgement on Jerusalem in AD70. At the personal level it indicates one’s life time, during which God expects his gifts to be cultivated.

Talents’ are coins representing sizable sums of money. A talent is equivalent to 6,000 denarii, or 20 years wages for a labourer! This parable is the source of the English word ‘talent,’ as the description of natural ability that can be improved by use, and diligent practice.

Though there are three servants, they constitute really two groups: the two who invest and double the amount; and the one who buries.

The master rebuked this servant for more than laziness – he was wicked. The servant was presumably insulted when the master entrusted him with only a single talent, while the others received more. He focuses on the meanness of the master, not on his own proven lack of enterprise. To lose nothing, he risks nothing, and not surprisingly, nothing comes of it. He takes the problem away from where it is, - with himself - and places it where it is not – with his master. He portrays the master as harsh: there is no admission that his own creativity leans towards the cemetery. He ends up burying part of himself. And we only bury what is dead.

Despising his master, then, he refused to trade-with – or even invest the talent, lest his master should benefit from his stewardship. The parable thus warns against sloth that is fuelled by envy. Failure to use and cultivate one's talents results in their loss.

Everything in the parable depends on the image the three had to their master. Jesus reveals a picture of a loving God who is unlimited in mercy and kindness, but who expects us to respond with a similar extravagance.

The Lord expects his gifts to be appreciated and used to further his kingdom. Which is why the parable ends with a tough reminder to the complacent, lazy or idle that the Lord expects us to imitate his love, not take it for granted. Christ expects us to work at our gifts, be they few or many, using them well, so providing God with interest.

In the parable, the master congratulates and rewards those who were faithful and productive in small affairs. And when we render an account for our lives, it will be according to these everyday uses of God's talents in me. We hope to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness.'

If we think we have no talent, hear the words of St John Henry Newman.
“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught.

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