

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
19th November 2023 - 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Prov 31:10-13,19-20,30-31. 2nd: 1 Thess 5:1-6. **Gospel:** Matthew 25:14-30.

You no doubt heard from your parents “the devil finds work for idle hands” or another in similar vein similar “Idleness is the porter at the gates of sin”.

The readings today emphasise 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.

One of the problems which St Paul had to deal with in writing his first letter in the NT about AD 50 part of which is today's 2nd reading was that believing as some of them did that Christ was almost immediately to return, they assumed that they could just sit back and wait for him.

Paul disillusioned them, emphasizing first that we cannot ever be certain when Christ will return, and even more vital, that we must work to fulfil his prayer ‘thy kingdom come,’ staying awake, spiritually.

The gospel is a story about our accountability to God.

There is a very serious sense of personal responsibility in the story which runs counter to the fashion of thinking today. We've come from an age when many people were weighed down by an excessively strict concept of God. Fear of God paralysed many people in their creativity and stunted their initiative. Many consciences were damaged for life. From the extreme of strictness we have swung to the opposite extreme of leniency. Authority is rejected; discipline is not in favour; the need for punishment is not understood; correction is not accepted.

As a result, we have a generation with no backbone, when people are incapable of making a firm commitment or of sticking faithfully to a promise. It has led to a very feeble sort of religious thought that produces wishy-washy statement like ‘All Jesus really asked for is love, but all the church gives is laws.’

But **where** is the strong-minded Jesus who preached the need for repentance; who was angry with the money-changers and hypocrites; who forgave the adulterous woman but told her to sin no more; who asked his followers to take up their crosses and follow him?

Feeble thinking picks and chooses what one likes from religion and disregards what does not appeal. The existence and influence of the devil are not taken seriously.

Hell is denied. And having to face the light of judgement and render account of life is totally forgotten, as indeed is future life.

This is all there is. When you are dead you are dead is the line. **NO: that is not our faith.**

At the old extreme, justice untempered by mercy produced a servile fear of God. ‘Sir,.... I was afraid.....so I hid your talent.’

But at the present extreme, a religion that stresses **mercy** but disregards God's **justice** is producing serious moral irresponsibility.

The parable today makes the point that God has invested in us and expects to make a profit on each investment. The return that God expects is that the divine love which we have received would be spread out on earth by us.

St John seems to suggest that God's love is incomplete until we pass it on. ‘As long as we love one another God will live in us and love will be complete in us. (1John 4: 12)

God's love does not come to perfection until we accept it and pass it on to others. God's investment is to be turned to profit, not to be buried in the ground.

The mistake being made by our contemporary feeble thinking is in underestimating how firm and tough Christian love must be. In the parable, the master congratulates and rewards those who were faithful and productive in the small affairs.

When we render an account of our lives, it will be according to these everyday uses of God's talents in us. May we 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.'

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