

Cycle A 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 PRV 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize. She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She obtains wool and flax and works with loving hands. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle. She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates.

Responsorial Psalm PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

R. (cf. 1a) Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Blessed are you who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways! For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; Your children like olive plants around your table.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Reading 2 1 THES 5:1-6

Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. When people are saying, "Peace and security, " then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.

Gospel MT 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one...to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"

The gospel readings of last weekend, this weekend and next weekend are taken from the 24th and 25th chapters of St. Matthew. These teachings are Christ's last ones before He was to enter Jerusalem and be put to death. They are His final testament to His disciples, intended to guide them, and us, in the time that is between His life here on earth and His Second Coming at the end of the world. These final teachings, which bring us to the end of the Church year, should be of great importance to us. When we analyze them in depth, they are challenging ...maybe even disturbing.

- Last week's parable told us about the five wise and the five foolish virgins. The wise lived life fully in the present, but they were vigilant and prepared with an eye to the future. The foolish ones did not look ahead or make provision for the coming of the bridegroom.
- Today's parable continues the theme of preparedness by two good stewards who took calculated risks, as well as a third servant who lacked courage, who was fear-driven, and who consequently was unproductive. This servant, like the foolish virgins, looked for an excuse. He was fooling himself by denying his own responsibilities and the consequences of his actions. We have to wonder what happened in his life that caused him to act this way. I have to say that scholars tell us that the Master in this Gospel is NOT God. That's good to know because he bothered me by the way he acted, especially toward the third servant.
- Next weekend we will be hearing that what we do for others, we do for Christ. Christ identifies with those in need...He looks at us through their eyes. The kingdom of God is established through those simple acts of kindness that reach deep into our hearts.

I trust we understand that all these parables are really talking to us about having faith. You see, Christ is in all these parables asking us and challenging us to have faith, to make faith-based decisions, to boldly act on faith. Faith is the engine that drives us. And faith isn't something we can hide and hold only for ourselves. It needs to be invested in the lives of others and only then can it be multiplied...Only then can it possibly bear fruit...Only then can our world get better. We were given faith not simply to save our own skins; God loves us so much that He gives us the gift of faith to change the world....to help save the world!

God has given us enormous treasures and talents through Jesus His Son. We have the power that God has given us, but we need to understand that Jesus is interested in productivity. He isn't looking for passive, hesitant people to follow Him and be His agents here on earth. He wants risk-takers to be His followers, like the two good servants...daring people who will activate His Church to benefit the world. Being a Christian without courage is being a Christian without taking risks. God encourages us to jump into life and run the risk of really making a difference.

As a Deacon for over 20 years, I have been privileged to be involved with many diverse ministries. I am recognizing a common theme running through all of them: invariably families are profoundly impacted by our ministries. And, it is not just those ministered to who benefit. When we take our experience of ministry back to our families, it changes the dynamic of our own family for the better as well. I see that when we take risks to invest our faith in the lives of others that everyone's faith is multiplied...I see everywhere that it is bearing fruit...I see how even serving one person at a time benefits multiple families, which makes our community and our world, better.

Several years ago I attended with 8 of my fellow parishioners a profound Archdiocese conference hosted by the Fortunate and Faithful Families ministry. I heard heart-wrenching stories from courageous parents and their children about judgement and bullying, about demeaning slurs and threats aimed at them. They shared their feeling of isolation and rejection, of doubt and pain, not only at school and work, but unfortunately at church as well. They didn't want to be fixed...they just wanted their families to be loved and accepted and allowed to worship. Two priests gave testimony on how they and their congregations are being loving homes by welcoming everyone. I was moved to tell one mom to please not to give up on us, the Body of Christ...that we would try to be more sensitive and caring of them and their gay children.

These last Sundays of the Church year, ought to challenge us...even disturb us. While it is true that Jesus is kind and merciful, and that He loves us unconditionally, it is likewise true that He has great and high expectations of each one of us. After all, God our Father didn't create us to

do nothing. It's what He created us for that ought to occupy our attention, disturb our conscience, and in fact prod us into being productive for Him. I mean, if we don't serve others in need now, how can we ever reveal God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven?