

Cycle A - 33rd Sunday In Ordinary Time (November 19th, 2017)

The first reading describes a woman who invests her talents wisely and reaps a bountiful return on them. She is like the wise servant portrayed in today's gospel and the opposite of the timid servant who lets his talent lie fallow.³ While this reading on the virtues of a "a worthy wife" can be read in a very straightforward, literal fashion, as a description of the ideal spouse, it can also be read as a description of the Bride of Christ, the Church at her best.¹⁶

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

The Book of Proverbs is a poetic anthology whose primary purpose is to teach wisdom.² Chapter 31, from which our reading is taken, was written by Lemuel, king of Massa, and consists of the advice which his mother taught him.¹⁵ Each of the verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.¹²

10When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. This is an exclamation of praise.¹

11Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize.

12She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. "good and not evil" means that she brings her husband prosperity and not adversity.²

13She obtains wool and flax and works with loving hands. This verse means that she is industrious.¹

19She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle.

20She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy.

30Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. The true charm of the ideal wife is her religious spirit. She has a reverential fear and respect for God, an awe of his presence, for she is AWARE OF HIM. This is the foundation of religion, which was clarified in the first chapter of this Book.² What she does has great value but what she is (one who fears the Lord) is even greater. This agrees with Sirach 25:11: "Fear of the Lord surpasses all else, its possessor is beyond compare." The Catechism lists "Fear of the Lord" as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and says that these gifts complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them and they also make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.⁴ (CCC 1831)

31Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates. An ideal wife is a woman of strong faith, character, and great compassion. Many people think that the ideal woman in the Bible was shy, servile, and completely domestic. This is not so. The ideal woman is one who puts God first in her life and has been blessed with many gifts and talents. Her abilities, intelligence, strength, and integrity do not come from her amazing achievements, but as a result of her reverence of God. In our society, where physical appearances count for so much, it may surprise us to realize that a woman's appearance is never mentioned. Her beauty comes entirely from her character.¹²

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

The Thessalonians had two questions that Paul addressed: in last week's reading he assured them that those who had died before the Second Coming would be raised and this week he deals with the question of when the great Day of the Lord will arrive. We cannot fully understand the New Testament pictures of the Second Coming unless we remember that they have an Old Testament background. In the OT the conception of the Day of the Lord is very common and all the images which belong to the Day of the Lord have been attached to the Second Coming. It would be a very terrible day. It would be a day in which one world was shattered and another was born. It would come suddenly and unexpectedly. It would involve a cosmic upheaval in which the universe was shaken to its very foundations and it would be a time of judgment.⁶

1Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything

to be written to you. Every age has its prophets of doom and calculators of an event that no one can possibly predict. Paul is essentially reminding them that “No one knows the day or the hour. Not even the Son for that knowledge is reserved to the Father.”(24:36)

2For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord “The day of the Lord” is the point in time when God will intervene decisively and irreversibly at the “Second Coming” which will also be the time of the General Judgment.⁵ **will come like a thief at night.** The Christian should always be on the watch and in the state of grace for he never knows for sure when the last day of his life will be. The second coming of the Lord will take people by surprise; it will catch them doing good or doing evil. So, it would be rash to postpone repentance to some time in the future.⁵ It would be wise for us to plan our lives as if we were going to live on earth forever and live our lives as if this were the last day.¹²

3When people are saying, “Peace and security,” The great threat to vigilance is complacency and false prophets of continued prosperity.¹ **then sudden disaster** The possibility of eternal separation from God.¹ **comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman,** The wicked will be seized with sudden contractions of pain that will intensify and never subside. (Hos. 13:12-13) **and they will not escape.** This refers to the inevitability of divine justice.¹ The Catechism tells us that before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of abandoning the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a false messiah.⁴ (CCC 675) It goes on to tell us that the kingdom will not be fulfilled by the historic triumph of the Church through a progressive increase in power, but only by God’s victory over the final unleashing of evil. God’s triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world.⁴ (CCC 677)

4But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, Christians are united to Christ, the light of the world and consequently are no longer subject to the assaults of darkness. In Judaism light and darkness are two opposing kingdoms.¹ **for that day to overtake you like a thief.**

5For all of you are children of the light This is a Semitic way of saying “sons of goodness, righteousness, and truth.(Eph. 5:8-9) **and children of the day.** This refers to their baptism where they received “the Word, which is the true light that enlightens every man.” At that time they became a “son of light.”⁴ (CCC 1216) **We are not of the night or of darkness.** Darkness is the element of chaos, of evil and disorder. It is the opposite of light and it stands for the sinful world that is full of wickedness that does not receive the light. There is no darkness in God.¹⁵ Those in darkness are living in sin and under the influence of evil powers.⁷

6Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober. This is an exhortation to stay alert and attentive to the Lord, anticipating his return. Our task is not to determine when the day of the Lord will occur, but to live in a way that we will be ready whenever the Lord comes.⁷

Matthew 25:14-30

This parable followed immediately after that of the Ten Virgins during the discourse in which Jesus foretold the coming fate of Jerusalem, pointed out the signs of his final advent to judge the world and repeated the warnings to be ever vigilant and ready for his Second Coming. It was spoken by Our Lord to the disciples as he sat on the western slopes of Mount Olivet, Tuesday afternoon of the first Holy Week.⁸

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

14“A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. The “man” is Jesus. The “servants” are the Apostles and their successors and even every human being. The

“journey” refers to the time between the Ascension and the Judgment or, on a personal level, our lifetime during which God expects his gifts to be cultivated. The “talents” are gifts and graces, internal and external, ordinary and extraordinary, temporal and spiritual.⁸

15To one he gave five talents; A talent was either a coin worth about 20 years wages for a laborer¹⁰, or it was a weight of about 100# of silver.⁹ **to another, two; to a third, one—to each according to his ability.** Note that the talents are not equally distributed. The Catechism quotes St. Catherine of Siena who had a dialogue with God in which he said: “I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, I shall give principally charity to one, justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one...And so I have given gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another...I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me.”⁴ (CCC 1937) **Then he went away.**

16Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five.

17Likewise, the one who received two made another two.

18But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money.

19After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. This signifies the coming of Christ to judge the world. The rewards of the faithful servants and the punishment of the wicked servant represent respectively the eternal rewards of the saved and the eternal punishment of the lost. The fruitfulness of our lives and our personal responsibility will be judged according to the gifts we have received.⁸ This is a reminder that your life is not for yourself! It is for God and for the good of all men through your love for our Lord.⁹

20The 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.’

21His 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.’ The first motive of the master in entrusting his property to his servants is to determine which were capable of assuming even more responsibility. But this testing yields to a second motive: determining which should share his joy.¹³

22Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.’

23His 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.’

24Then 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;

25so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.’ This servant was not as bad as some people for he did not waste his master’s goods like the defrauding manager nor, like the prodigal son, did he indulge in riotous living, nor, like the unmerciful servant did he become hopelessly in debt. His problem is that he misunderstood the purpose of life and the gifts of God about which no one may think and do as he pleases. All we have is for use, not for abuse; for others, as well as for ourselves.⁸ The real issue is not how much we have, but what we do with what we have for we are caretakers and not owners of the gifts that God has given us.¹²

26His master said to him in reply, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! Sloth, which is the sluggishness of soul or boredom of the exertion necessary for the performance of any good work,¹¹ is a Capital Sin, which means that it attracts and causes other sins to develop!⁴ (CCC 1866) **So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?**

27Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?

28Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. Failure to use and cultivate one's talents results in their loss.¹⁰

29For 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. This means that if a man has a talent and exercises it, he is progressively able to do more with it. But, if he has a talent and fails to exercise it, he will inevitably lose it. If we have some proficiency in anything, the more we exercise it, the harder the work and the bigger the task we will be able to tackle. If we fail to use it, we lose it!¹⁴ This parable is about stewardship. It warns against the dangers of sloth, whereby God-given blessings and abilities are squandered because of fear and laziness. Personal diligence, however, is greatly rewarded with superior gifts and responsibilities. Accountability to Christ entails risk and challenges. God's endowments must be invested in and for the good of others to increase heavenly earnings.¹⁰ Seeing love as a gift entrusted to us helps make sense of this comment for those who have will gain more. Love grows only by being shared, not by hoarding it.⁷

30And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." This expression alludes to condemnation at the last judgment and so is the opposite of "Enter into the joy of your master." It describes the frustration of those excluded from the master's joy.¹³

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (2) "Saint Joseph Edition: The New American Bible," (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (5) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles," (6) "The Letters To The Philipppians, Colossians, And Thessalonians" by William Barclay, (7) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (8) "The Parables Of Christ" by Charles J. Callan, O.P., (9) "The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew," (10) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "The Catholic Catechism" by John A. Hardon, S.J., (12) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (13) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (14) "The Gospel of Matthew" by William Barclay, (15) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., and (16) Commentary Notes from Sean Innerst and Tim Gray.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who originally compiled these commentaries.