

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
NOVEMBER 15, 2020
THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

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

A worthy wife is a great treasure.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

The Day of the Lord is coming.

Matthew 25:14-30

We are responsible for the gifts given.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

The fifth and final sermon of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (24:1-25:46) brings to a conclusion all the teachings that Matthew wanted to convey to the leaders of his Christian Jewish community. It has been called the *Sermon of Woes and Wows!* In it, Matthew gathers the words of Jesus on the destruction of the Temple (which has already occurred by the time this is written) and the beginning of the mighty sufferings to be endured. Jesus speaks of the Great Tribulation to come. The Son of Man will appear. An example is given of what will happen to those who have not been faithful: the lesson of the fig tree. Jesus says that the day and the hour for all this to take place is unknown. Three parables illustrate the teaching on the judgment: The Faithful and the Unfaithful Servant, The Wise and the Foolish Virgins, The Parable of the Talents. And, finally, the great scene of the Judgment of the Nations.

Thus, we have the context for the proclamation that will bring closure to Jesus' message. The Parable of the Talents appears to Matthew to be the climax of all that we must know before we face the judgment of separation based on how we have treated Jesus in one another. The proper and fruitful use we make of the natural gifts we have been given will determine our fate and our future for all eternity.

Talents has both a symbolic and a literal meaning in this parable. We have only to look at ourselves and at others to see that God has given natural gifts in various measures to different people. I have not been given a good singing voice; I do not readily understand mathematical concepts; I do not have very good hand-to-eye coordination, etc. There are many other gifts that I lack. *Talents* also referred to units of money in the ancient world. A silver talent was worth about \$1,000. Ten talents was all that a person could ever hope to earn in a lifetime.

Jesus may have originally addressed a criticism of the way the Sadducees refuse to develop the tradition of Judaism to allow for the resurrection of the dead. In Matthew, the meaning is much more general: What to do with the gifts that God has given us in preparation for the judgment to come? We are responsible for the proper disposition of what comes from God. Our lives are on loan to us; they are to be used for God's purposes.

Proverbs:

The Book of Proverbs is made up of two-line sayings that apply to moral behavior (Chapter 10-29), preceded by a long introduction of poems and songs (Chapters 1-19), and concluded by longer sayings and poems (Chapters 30-31). The *Poem of the Wife* can be found at the very end of the book. The experts say that it is an *acrostic poem*. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the next verse with the next letter, etc. This device was used as a memory aid to help those who recited the poem to remember the next line. The *wife* who is extolled here is probably a domestication of *wisdom*, bringing God into the level of the home and the family. The *wife* represents *God* to the Hebrew family. The use of a female personage to represent God echoes the language of Isaiah and other prophets. The Christian Scriptures, which were heavily influenced by Greek thought forms and culture, have lost this usage. So has the Church.

Thessalonians:

Having previously discussed what is going to happen to those who have died when the end comes, Paul now addresses what will happen to those who are still living. The *Day of the Lord*, traditionally in Jewish literature, refers to the time when God will intervene to bring about a correction in human history (Amos 8:18; Joel 2:1; Zephaniah 1:7). The same can be found in Christian literature (Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5). Later in Paul, the *day* will be that of Christ (Philemon 1:6,10). In apocalyptic writings, the end is always sudden and most often unexpected. Paul tells us that we will not be caught off guard since we have been given the *light* of the Spirit to discern when all is to happen. If we are always ready for the return of Christ, then what does it matter if he comes suddenly?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways has *fear* stood in the way of your developing some of your God-given talents and gifts? Fear of what? Failure? Loss? Ridicule from others? How can *faith* help us to overcome our *fear*? Is it really fear of *God* or fear of *people* that prevents you from developing your talents?
2. What negative experiences have you had that prevent you from offering your gifts in ministry in the Church community? Did anyone ever tell you that your gifts were not worthwhile? That you were not worthwhile? That you had nothing to offer? How can we validate each other's gifts and make us feel that our gifts are needed? When was the last time you expressed appreciation for the gifts of people around you in family and in parish?
3. What are the ways you would suggest in which the Church could be more effective in offering its God-given gifts to the world? How could the Church improve its ways of communicating the good news of Jesus Christ? How could your parish be more effective in its liturgies, in celebrating the sacraments, in reaching out to those who are marginal in society or those who feel left out? How could we do better at reaching out to those who are divorced and remarried?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

“If you give a person a fish, they eat for a day; if you teach them to fish, they eat every day.”
Ask your parish pastoral staff for information on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.
See what your group or your family can do to help people help themselves.

PRAYER

*Father of all that is good,
keep us faithful in serving you,
for to serve you is our lasting joy.*

Opening Prayer for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Stewardship is not well-known as a word in the Catholic lexicon. There is something faintly Protestant about it, don't you think?

When I was a younger priest involved in campus ministry, I had a good friend, the Reverend Doctor Hugh Chapman Crouch, who was both a professor at the college where I also taught and the pastor of a local Baptist church. I was close to this minister and to the lay leaders of his church. They taught me a great deal. One of the things I learned was about *stewardship*, the responsibility to use well the gifts that God has given us. The way they funded their ministries in this church was to appeal to their members' sense of *stewardship*. The Finance Committee would work out the budget for the coming year and put it to a vote of the church membership at the annual meeting. When the budget had been approved, the Finance Committee divided it up among the church members according to a formula based on the estimated income of each member; something like the tax rate in a municipality. Then, two members of the committee went to call on each church member by appointment. They said, "We understand you have an annual income of \$50,000. Your share of the budget this year will be \$2,500. Will you please sign this pledge card?" These pledges were to be paid in an annual, quarterly, or monthly check mailed to the church treasurer. The Sunday donations in the offertory collection were extra (!) and to be used only for external purposes: mission funding, etc.

Of course, church membership was entirely *voluntary* and renewed every year by a solemn commitment made at the annual meeting. The members knew that by accepting to be members, they were accepting to support the ministries and the expenses of the church. Each had a rather well-developed sense of responsibility for the Gospel and for the works of the church. (The *church* is only the *local congregation* in Baptist vocabulary.)

Catholics are only just beginning to understand *stewardship*. Most Catholic immigrants to America years ago came from countries where the Church was to a great measure supported by government grants. It was hard for them to learn that here their parish and their diocese only had the funds that they themselves contributed. They learned the lesson well. Look at the church buildings, rectories, schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. that they built from their meager earnings!

Today, the Catholic people need to rediscover the generosity of their ancestors here in America. Each person in the pew needs to be aware of how God asks each individual to be personally responsible for the support of the parish, and of the diocese, and of the Universal Church.

© 2017 Rev. Clement D. Thibodeau. All rights reserved.