

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – November 19, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Prov 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.

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.

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

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.

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 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: Matthew 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.'"



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The Gospel story is pretty simple. A wealthy man gives his fortune to each of his three servants to care for while he is gone on a trip. He doesn't give them instructions, at least that we are told of. When he returns, the owner sees that two of the three servants invested his money and got back twice the amount. He is delighted. So far, the moral of the story would be: "Make the most of what you have." But we miss the most interesting part of all if we look just at the successful servants (as does the shortened version of the Gospel in the lectionary!!!). We miss the fascinating and puzzling story of the third servant. This poor soul did not invest the money at all. He buried it in the ground. Quite simply, he was afraid of investing and losing it. He was right to be afraid, given the owner's attitude, which, as we see, would have the man thrown into "the darkness outside" where there would be "wailing and grinding of teeth." Quite an overreaction, it seems. This poor guy just wanted to keep the owner's money safe! Maybe the proprietor was simply a "demanding person," as the parable says. Dark spirited.

But there is more to it. The monetary unit "talent" in Jesus' time was not a small amount. Even one talent could be worth more than a laborer would earn in a lifetime. And the owner entrusted a lot more than just money to the servants. He left them all his possessions, everything he had. He took a great risk and he wanted them to do the same, not leave the investment rotting away underground somewhere. Now assume that the parable is about God. Maybe God entrusts an even greater amount to us: life, talents, the gift of love, of the living breathing human persons around us—and every so often, real and open acts of unselfish love. God gives all this free of charge, gives to us our own lives with all their rewards and disappointments and catastrophes and he says to us, dive in! Have your life! Make whatever you will of it! You are beloved to me!

This is truly wonderful! But then an awful question arises. Does God curse those who are afraid and who bury what they are given? Jesus at least seems to say yes: 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. Ouch. That hurts. How are we to interpret these words? Well, in the realm of spirituality there is only one thing that completely goes away if you only have a small bit of it, but which gets greater if you have it and use it. Love. If we love those around us, that love peaks and grows. But if fear slams the door against love, guess what. The non-lover will be in the darkness outside, wailing and gnashing his teeth. We are all frightened. It is not so unusual. God waits for ages to see if we will accept just a tiny bit of the forgiving love he offers and to see if we will even find just enough courage to invest some of that love in other people. It is a big risk he takes, and I'm sure he says, "oh no, not again" when we fail. But this is not a harsh reaction. It is just a disappointment of someone who loves us very well. You see, love casts out fear. So, let love in.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Do you see a connection between this woman and the wise servant portrayed in the Gospel? How does fear of the Lord (awe and wonder in the presence of God) help make a person wise?
2. Apparently "The Day of the Lord" can overtake you "like a thief at night." Are you always ready? Almost ready? Dozing a little?
3. Are you willing to take risks, or are you paralyzed by fear? If you were a leader in the Church, what kind of risks would you take to insure growth of the faithful? Is there a person whom you observe taking risks for such growth?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God, the constant gladness of being devoted to you, for it is full and lasting happiness to serve with constancy the author of all that is good. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.