

November 15, 2020

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord's plans for us are peace and not disaster!

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

Psalms 128:1-5

1 Thess. 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

The poetic reading from Proverbs concerns a worthy wife and emphasizes a person who uses her talents well. Unlike the servant who buries his talents, the worthy wife puts all her abilities to good use, and in addition fears the Lord, a known step towards obtaining Wisdom.

The psalmist describes the blessings that naturally flow from a man who walks in the ways of the Lord. Such a man will not go hungry for he will eat the fruits of his handiwork. His wife will be like a fruitful vine in his home, his children like olive plants around his table.

Paul realizes the Thessalonians have concerns and even fears about the Second Coming. They are asking questions about times and seasons, just as the disciples did. Paul reminds them that this is a needless concern because it should be clear that no one knows the time and instead they should always be ready because the end will come like a thief in the night, without warning.

Jesus tells his listeners the parable of servants. All were given silver pieces to invest but the one who hid his money was afraid of his master, afraid that when held accountable he would be found lacking because the master was a tough taskmaster. What was given to him was taken away and given to the most productive.



The Father invests talents in us,
The Son guides us to where they are needed.
The Holy Spirit opens up creative ways to use them.

Today's Gospel speaks of the end times. Jesus teaches his disciples and us that while we wait for the Second Coming, we should not, out of fear of failure or fear of accountability, neglect to use our talents. The word talent refers to a valuable silver piece, and is the source word for our English word talent. Considering the context of the parable we may note that talents are not earned by hard work but are placed in our keeping so that we may use them for the good of the community. Don't bury them away, but use them so they will develop.

"The reading from the Holy Gospel advises us to bear in mind that we who have received something more than others in this world may be judged more severely by the world's creator. When his gifts increase the responsibility of accounting for them is also greater. Many people in the church resemble the fearful servant. They are afraid to attempt a better way of life, but not of resting in idleness." (Saint Gregory the Great, 7th century)

Are you actively seeking a more spiritually productive way of life?

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Spiritual Gifts and Talents

Natural talents are easily recognizable and appreciated in the modern world. The gifted athlete, the student scholar, the prolific writer are honored in obvious ways.....the athletes receive high salaries, the student, scholarships at the best universities, the writer making the best seller list. But there are latent talents in all of us, especially talents of spiritual nature that seem to take a back seat at a time when needed most.

When we concentrate on things above we put more emphasis on the spiritual gifts which are over and above our natural talents and build upon them. In many cases they lie dormant within us, ready to overflow as springs of living water with the touch of the Holy Spirit. Are we aware of our spiritual gifts that enhance our talents? Are we being encouraged to use and develop them? Are our leaders exercising them? How do we seek such gifts? How do we ask the Lord for them?

Consider the words of Bishop Isaac of Nineveh who lived in the 7th century:

Seek precious things from the One who does not withhold; you will receive honor from Him because of the wise choice of your will. Solomon asked for wisdom and he received an earthly kingdom with it because he knew how to ask wisely, that is, great things from the King. Elisha asked for a double share of his master's spirit and his request was not denied him. The King's honor is diminished by the one who asks Him for base things.

To seek less belittles the potential of man and does not magnify the glory of God who created us in his image. The standard we set for ourselves is usually too low and not the norm that Jesus expects. Jesus preached clearly that the Kingdom of God is at hand and each of us as a gifted Christian has a responsibility in building it up. Is there a divine ideal, a spiritual guide that brings a greater understanding of the gifts? Let me put this in the perspective of the Trinity. We do not fully comprehend the mystery of the Trinity but our faith tells us that the unity of the Trinity is the foundation of all things and is the originating and creative power behind all things. This is especially true for the spiritual gifts. We commonly associate the spiritual gifts with the Holy Spirit, and rightly so, however, a more complete understanding involves the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the passage in 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7 will exemplify this. Every gift which the Spirit conveys is consecrated through Jesus Christ according to the purposes of the Father.

- 4: There are different gifts but the same Spirit.
- 5: There are different ministries but the same Lord;
- 6: There are different works but the same God who accomplishes them in everyone.
- 7: To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

I will not elaborate on the many spiritual gifts but only mention here that verse 4 indicates that the Holy Spirit is the Source of the gifts. *Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in*

*generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*¹ The gifts put us on a unique path: *Yet with his great knowledge the Lord makes men unlike; in different paths he has them walk. Like clay in the hands of the potter, to be molded according to his pleasure, so are men in the hands of their creator, to be assigned by him their function.*² We are called to accept and magnify the gifts that the Spirit places before us and resolve that these possibilities shall not lie fallow.

In turn verse 5 leads us to the concept of ministry, the place where we can develop our spiritual gifts. Jesus opens the necessary doors for us where we are able to use the gifts and perfect their use. Paul says, *Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace.*³ The development of the gifts is progressive, proceeding step by step, each step being necessary as a preparation for the one to follow, and so are magnified over time. The Lord wants more from us than merely accepting the gifts; they are to be used and perfected by our efforts. Commitment and personal responsibility come into play as we recall the Parable of the Talents⁴ which implies it is not enough to simply hang onto a gift since the person who merely did that had what was given to him, taken away. Ministries are where we can develop and perfect the gifts. Archippus is told to *take care and discharge the ministry we have received in the Lord.*⁵ Paul reminds Timothy: *But you be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry.*⁶ Paul notes: *He who descended is the very one who ascended high above the heavens, that he might fill all men with his gifts. It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ...*⁷

Verse 6 implies that the accomplishments of our works within our ministries are assigned by the Father and accomplishment attributed to his power. Even Jesus mentions *the works the Father has given to me to accomplish.*⁸ It is God's power working through us as instruments that accomplish the tasks set out before us. This realization gives us a sense of confidence and an expectation of positive results. Furthermore the workings of the gifts are not to be hindered by precedent since Jesus said, *I solemnly assure you, the man who has faith in me will do the works I do, and greater far than these.*⁹ Even if we are called to the most difficult of tasks and we say yes, trust that the Father will do it through us! People questioned Jesus about the works he was performing: *So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent."*¹⁰ The power to accomplish good works begins with faith in Jesus and continues as we exercise our spiritual gifts in conformity to the Father's purposes.

¹ Romans 12:6-8

² Sirach 33:11,13

³ Acts 20:24

⁴ Matt 25:14-30

⁵ Colossians 4:17

⁶ 2Tim 4:5

⁷ Ephesians 4:10-11

⁸ John 5:36

⁹ John 14:12

¹⁰ John 6:28-29

Such works are cooperative projects between God and man; they are selected by the Father, initiated by the Son, and guided by the Spirit. Discernment indicates what I am becoming involved with; my personal initiative enables me to put heart and soul into the work and pursue it vigorously; my determination sees it through. Creative energy will be supplied and while progress may be slow it will be steady and recognizable. Using the gifts can often lead to unexpected sacrifices. Consider the time Jesus healed the leper and commanded him to tell no one except the priest. *Instead the man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.*¹¹ Before the healing the leper had to remain in the shadows and shun everyone, but after the healing he could move about freely while Jesus had to avoid populated areas.

Verse 7 is clear in that the real purpose of our efforts involves the common good and Peter says *the gifts are to be used in the service of one another.*¹² In other words the gifts must be used in harmony, not only with the will of God, but also within the community. In Romans 15:5-6 Paul says, *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant us to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Furthermore, the use of the gifts must harmonize without antagonizing the exercise of similar gifts with the faithful in and out of our community. The spiritual power of the gifts cannot be used with any sort of antagonism to the Spirit, a limitation that makes common sense, since they need to express God's will itself. If the gifts are used for personal aggrandizement it can result in envy, pride, arrogance, and exclusiveness, and therefore disrupt harmony.

The image of the people of God as the Body of Christ also gives us a paradigm of working together and just as the body has different parts, we have different gifts. The community is a creative dynamo when all parts are working together. We all have experienced a body ache or pain that created turmoil for us and how difficult it became to concentrate upon our work so in the same way one unfulfilled person in the community, one person who is hurting in some way can cause disruption in the parts working together. When we see this we need to help and affirm our brothers and sisters and bring them back to where they need to be....for the good of the community as well as their good.

Fractals are beautiful and complicated images created with mathematical formulas. Limited self-similarity is a property of many such images, i.e. go to a small part of the image, magnify it, and behold it reproduces the original image, and you can keep on repeating this. Similarly the photographic plates of a hologram can be projected into a 3-D image. Fracture the plate into pieces and each piece still contains the information for the complete image although some clarity is lost at each break. This gives an idea that within each church community there is contained the image of the Church Universal.

Do not become anxious about what your gifts are. *The Spirit will help us recognize the gifts given to us.*¹³ Work on your responsibilities as best you can in and out of the community and

¹¹ Mark 1:40-45

¹² 1 Peter 4:10

¹³ 1 Cor 2:12

do not be disheartened when results are not quickly seen. *Therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged.*¹⁴

May God the Father empower you,
Jesus his Son guide you,
And the Holy Spirit gift you.

*I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God bestowed on you.*¹⁵

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¹⁴ 2 Cor 4:1

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 1:6