

SUNDAY REFLECTIONS – 33rd Sunday Year A – 19th November 2017

Matthew 25:14-30

another two, to a third, one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."



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Reflection on the Gospel

One key theme running through today's readings is the contentment that comes from a life lived in accordance with God's will. The Hebrew expression for this is "living in the fear of the Lord", which means having the kind of relationship with God that leads human beings to honour their commitment to God.

Modern hearers of the passage about the "perfect wife" will note that the perspective of the writer is decidedly male, although this is not surprising given the patriarchal society the writers belonged to.

It's a rather famous passage from the last section of the book of Proverbs and describes the ideal

wife seen through the eyes of a 4th century B.C. male who is financially well off. The intention of the poem is to present an ode to the strong and capable wife. Our English translation calls her the **perfect wife**, but this does not do justice to the original Hebrew idea of the strong capable woman who is the ideal companion to a man of substance, and the poet's intention is to address the young men of his time and point out that this the sort of wife they should seek.

The gospel reading is Matthew's version of Jesus' parable of the talents! The first two slaves double their initial capital and are given suitable rewards along with the master's congratulations. The third slave buries his money and makes no profit at all. At the time of reckoning he tells the master that he did not want to risk making his talent work for fear of losing it and having nothing at all to give back. The master condemns him for his lack of ingenuity. In addition, the third slave is thrown into prison and punished as worthless and so is cast out of the master's household.

This is not a parable about God expecting all humans to use their talents in order to give a good account of themselves at the day of reckoning. For instance, the third slave virtually accuses the master of being a thief, reaping where he had not sown and drawing profit from dubious sources. The slave owner does not take offence at this but chides the slave for not having taken full account of the master's character. In fact, the third slave **has not** gone out and ripped anybody off in his effort to double his capital.

Notice the master does not seem concerned about how the slaves increase their profit margin just so long as they are successful. This is definitely not a profile of how God operates, so it is important that we



don't read this parable allegorically, i.e., seeing the master as a figure of God and seeing the servants as human beings who are obliged to return a profit with their personal gifts.

We would be better off looking for messages in this parable that make it applicable to our lives. For instance, the third slave shows how people can become paralysed by fear of failure and as a result never take risks or launch out into the deep.

The parable tells us that if those who are afraid of failure do nothing then the risk-takers will move in and gain the advantage. This was particularly pertinent to Matthew's world when the early Christians had to face opposition for their commitment to Christ, but it is no less true for Christians today in a world that is focused on 'me' and cynical of the values of Jesus Christ.

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Prayerful Reflection

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to

the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death.

Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection. Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, and above all in the poor and suffering.

May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace.

Fear always has its roots in self-protection. Selfishness is the root of sin.

I'm not talking about the natural instinct to not walk off a cliff because you know it will kill you,

I'm talking about that fear that keeps us from letting go of self so that Jesus can change us into His image once again.

Are you afraid of God?

✚ **I don't want to stand out or look different.** If I give myself over completely to God He will make me "weird" and strange and I might be ridiculed.

✚ **I might have to do something that makes me uncomfortable.** Knocking on the neighbors' door and talking about Jesus is what those "weird" people do. That's not for me. I'll just make sure I'm really nice to people and that will be my ministry.

✚ **What if He asks me to give all my money to the poor?** I don't trust Him enough to care for me so I need to hold on to what I have earned. Did Jesus REALLY want me to drop EVERYTHING and follow Him?

✚ **I don't want to give up that treasured sin.** I'll submit some of me, but not all of me...I'm sure God will understand. Besides I gave up all those other things, He must give me some credit for that; right?

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To Ponder

a) What is the meaning of this text. What has struck me most deeply?

b) In the parable, the three servants receive according to their capacity. What is the attitude of each servant concerning the gift he has received?

c) What is the reaction of the master? What does he demand from his servants?

d) How should the following phrase be understood: "To everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has"?

e) What image of God does the parable reveal to us?

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Prayers of the Faithful

1. That the Church may not be fearful of change and renewal so as to bring to the people of the world its message of hope and life.

2. That all people may share in the earth's resources in justice, friendship and peace.

3. That the strong and the powerful of this earth may cooperate toward the human and economic development of all nations especially marginalised groups.

4. That those who live with illness and chronic pain may find in those who care for them the compassion and love of Christ.