

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: NOVEMBER 15, 2020

Today brings us closer to the end of the liturgical year. Two weeks from today we begin the season of Advent. In these final weeks of the current liturgical year the scriptures turn to end times, to the end of life, to the end of the ministry of Jesus.

Last week the gospel gave us the parable of the ten brides-maids and the lesson on vigilance, being ready, increasing one's awareness of what is happening. Next week the gospel will be that of the last judgement. Today the gospel parable is largely about accountability for our lives.

The praise of the valiant women in the first reading from the Book of Proverbs intends to demonstrate the accountability of this resourceful woman, clever in both domestic and business affairs. Many women like this reading and choose it for their funeral Mass. Other women find it paternalistic and demeaning. I leave it to each of you to decide what camp you are in.

Saint Paul wrote to the people of Thessalonika and says to us today, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.... So then let us not fall asleep as others do but let us keep awake." We hear a reprise of last week's theme of vigilance.

Some American writers find in the gospel a defense of capitalism. But it is no more such a meaning to this story than it is a praise of slavery nor is it a particularly flattering image of the landowner who, supposedly, is God. In the parable the first two servants are praised for making good use of what has been entrusted to them. The third servant is condemned for failing to use the gifts.

What is being asked of us is to be accountable for what we do not do. We sin by omission. A clear example of this today is the lack of care that, at least until recently, we have shown to the care of the natural environment, the impending doom of the climate crisis, the neglect of Pope Francis' encyclical of five years ago, *Laudato Si*, in which he called us to take care of the earth and the care of the poor. The abuse of the earth is a pro-life issue that impacts many people now and will impact our grandchildren. God's creation is in our hands. To ignore Earth's crisis is tantamount to telling the creator "we care nothing for your talent – or even the future of life." We have buried the talent given us when we neglect the land, water, air, plants and animals.

Perhaps the problem starts with our daily neglect in smaller matters. Our mission on earth is a challenge not to be too timid or fearful to be a full human being. This voice invites us to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy the wonderful energy, color, wit, intelligence, and creativity that makes the world go round and makes life worth living. This is the voice that beckons us towards romance, creativity, art, sex, achievement, physical health. Life, it insists, needs to be tasted in God's name.

We are all frightened and God always has compassion on us. God waits for ages to see if we will accept just a bit of the love he offers, and if we will even find enough courage to invest some of it in other people and in the earth.

Pope Saint John XXIII, back in the nineteen-sixties, has been quoted as saying, "We are not on earth to guard a museum, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life." At a moment when many were preoccupied with keeping the deposit of faith secure, Pope John called for a new venture of renewal and dialogue in our life of Christian discipleship and mission. He was seventy-eight years old but was not afraid to use the talent given him to stir up the church and he called the Second Vatican Council. He felt accountable for the church and rather than bury his talent, he reached out to bring new life to it.

The state of the world and the church right now can discourage us and we might want to withdraw. But we trust God is still with us. Christ moves among us. We have been given talents to use and develop for the good of the world, for the common good. When our time comes to leave this life, how will we answer God in asking us how we used what we have been freely given? Do not fear, Jesus said often. Have courage. I have overcome the world.

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