



*"But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money"  
(Matthew 25:18).*

**33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A  
November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

## First Reading: Proverbs 31:10-31

- <sup>10</sup> A capable wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.
- <sup>11</sup> The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.
- <sup>12</sup> She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.
- <sup>13</sup> She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.
- <sup>14</sup> She is like the ships of the merchant,  
she brings her food from far away.
- <sup>15</sup> She rises while it is still night  
and provides food for her household  
and tasks for her servant-girls.
- <sup>16</sup> She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- <sup>17</sup> She girds herself with strength,  
and makes her arms strong.
- <sup>18</sup> She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- <sup>19</sup> She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.
- <sup>20</sup> She opens her hand to the poor,  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- <sup>21</sup> She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- <sup>22</sup> She makes herself coverings;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- <sup>23</sup> Her husband is known in the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
- <sup>24</sup> She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
- <sup>25</sup> Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.
- <sup>26</sup> She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- <sup>27</sup> She looks well to the ways of her household,  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- <sup>28</sup> Her children rise up and call her happy;  
her husband too, and he praises her:
- <sup>29</sup> 'Many women have done excellently,

but you surpass them all.'

<sup>30</sup> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

<sup>31</sup> Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

## **Responsorial Psalm: 128:1-5**

**Lector:** <sup>1</sup> Happy is everyone who fears the Lord,

**All:** who walks in his ways.

**Lector:** <sup>2</sup> You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands;

**All:** you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.

**Lector:** <sup>3</sup> Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
within your house; your children will be like olive shoots  
around your table.

**All:** <sup>4</sup> Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

**Lector:** <sup>5</sup> The Lord bless you from Zion.

**All:** May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem  
all the days of your life.

## **Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6**

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When they say, „There is peace and security“, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

## **Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:14-30**

<sup>14</sup> For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>22</sup>And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." <sup>24</sup>Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." <sup>26</sup>But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

## **Homily**

Nearly all of us have grown up with the story of the talents, where two servants flourished and multiplied the property entrusted to them by their master, and the one being afraid of loss, buried his. This is an important study on many levels and I hope that today we can stretch a bit and see it in some new ways. The word "talent" was a monetary unit and it was huge: One talent was more than a laborer might earn in an entire lifespan. But in our common usage and thinking about this passage, "talent" has often been used to imply the gifts that we each have in terms of special abilities, not just wealth. And in this case, the master entrusted all of his possessions, not just the talents. He took a great risk and had to trust the servants while he was away.

So I think the basic dynamic in this story is about trust and using wisely what is given us in whatever form on behalf of the Lord, who loans us either talents and abilities or blesses us with physical provisions. The story is about fidelity and trust, God's provision

and trust for us to creatively use what he gives us and our trust and fidelity to God who is the source of all that we have. We need not become arrogant or full of pride when we succeed, nor do we need to diminish ourselves in a false humility, thinking of ourselves small and unworthy, and thus giving up and not risking effort.

So how did the other passages in this week's lectionary tie in to the Gospel parable? The worthy wife in Proverbs can be seen as active, energetic, weighing risks, making choices, improving her situation and energetically faithful to the tasks God gives everyone whether male or female every day.<sup>1</sup> The Psalm this week is sometimes called the "Marriage Psalm" because it praises the happily married man, and the same spirit characterizes him. The Proverbs writer says "...a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates. (Verses 30-31). The Psalmist says: "Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life (Verses 4-5).

The picture is that as servants of God and of each other whether in a partnership or marriage or on our own -- we seek after trusting in God and actively and creatively and living out his innovative works in the world. Just as the Master in the Gospel story entrusted the servants to use their own wits to preserve and expand the gifts, the husband in Proverbs praises his wife's good choices. Great praise goes to those who revere God and live to share in his justice toward others, to improve the lives of others, and caring for the poor. In our Second Reading, Paul suggests that the sleep of indifference is deadly, and that we should keep busy and be prepared for the "day of the Lord (Verse 2).

The talent in the Gospel story may be thought of as reflective of the bounty and generosity of life itself, the preeminent gift of faith. As we mature in our faith and assume responsibility for our gifts, using them and investing them properly, we will not hide ourselves either out of fear of failure nor will we remain passive and uninvolved out of sheer laziness. What we receive, we must receive for the good of others, not just ourselves and if we don't use it, we will lose the abilities that we were given.

And especially our minds, research is clear that those who use their minds and keep active are less prone to cognitive decline as they age. Perhaps in youth we develop some of our gifts and become "fruitful" in the world, and as we mature in the faith, we find new applications. Rather than burying ourselves too early by sitting in the proverbial rocking chair, it is a time to become more creative in how we invest our efforts and time.

And speaking of creativity: when we study scriptures, we need to apply our gifts and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us something new. Another level to this story of the talents may be the contrast between the Jewish religious leaders who held on to the literal words of the Torah and in essence buried them in the ground, maintaining the words but not planting them as seeds that grow into a more lush understanding, like those who took the words of God out and multiplied them. Perhaps there is a level

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<sup>1</sup> I have used the entire Proverbs passage. In the RCC Lectionary, they remove some of the verses, most noteworthy those that depict the worthy wife out negotiating for goods and land. A bit of discomfort with her, perhaps? It is OK for her to be industrious as long as she's not independently functioning? Just a thought....

here that is meaningful even today, where religious traditions that insist on literal interpretation of scripture have lost the vitality and power of the word of God.

***O God,  
it is your nature.  
You give us yourself***

***In freedom we have received your Spirit.  
Help us to freely give it away, then  
receive it  
back.***

***We want to say with the servant, "You  
gave me two talents.  
I have made two more!"***

***Let us take part in your Spirit, and  
to share in your  
eternal joy.***

...

***Come to us, O Lord.***

***Do not let us fear your coming as  
though you were  
a thief in the  
night.***

***Please dispel our darkness. Birth  
us into soft daylight as children  
of  
the light***

***We watch and wait for  
you.***

***Amen.***