

Homily Notes for Sunday November 19, 2017 – 33rd Ordinary A

Readings: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:1:6; Matthew 25:14-30

Summary: The main theme of the three readings is an invitation to live in such a way that we make the best use of the talents God has given us, so that at the hour of our death Our Lord will say: *“Well done, my good and faithful servant! Come and share the joy of your master.”*

This is the next to the last Sunday in the church year.

It reminds us of the preparations we need to make to reach heaven.

The first reading shows the profound appreciation for a woman’s abilities (Prov 31).

This is the best Sunday of the year to think of stewardship:

our use of our time, our talents and our treasure in the service of the Lord.

Concerning the “Last Things” see CCC ## 1020 – 1060 (heaven and hell, death and judgment).

1st Reading: Proverbs 31:10-31 speaks of the ideal, worthy wife. Note all the areas of responsibility and involvement set forth for her! Our reading is only a selection. This reading suggests that we should be as diligent and industrious as a loyal and faithful wife in the use of our God-given gifts and talents with *“the fear of the Lord.”* Unlike the one-talent man, she takes this gift and *“brings forth good, not evil”*; she *“reaches her hands to the poor and extends her arms to the needy.”*

Personal Application: What would be the personal qualities, virtues, abilities, attitudes that would make a person, man or woman, to be like this.

In today’s Responsorial Psalm, No. 128, the Sacred Writer echoes the concept of the blessedness of the faithful servant of the Lord. The psalm affirms that the *fear of the Lord* is the key to human happiness and success.

The *“fear of the Lord”* is very important in these readings. What is it? In part it is the reverential fear or respect that we should have of one who is infinitely greater than we are. Perhaps more seriously the *“fear of the Lord”* refers to the very actual fear of offending God or of *“missing the mark”* so that we would not be ready (Matt 25:1-13), of not being productive or responsible stewards (servants), being cast into the *“outer darkness where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (represents eternal condemnation of Hell).

In the second reading, Paul challenges the Thessalonians to use their fear of the Lord to keep awake and to be sober, encouraging, building up each other, and engaging in positive constructive, Jesus-pleasing actions as they wait for the *“Day of the Lord”* (See Amos 5:18-27). Martin Luther King quoted this passage in Amos in his *“I have a dream”* speech *“Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*

Today’s gospel challenges us to ask the questions: Are we using our talents and gifts primarily to serve God? Are we doing everything we can to carry out God’s will? The parable of the talents challenges us to do something good for God with our talents now and in the future.

Four lessons taught by Jesus through the parable.

- 1) *God gives each person different gifts for his or her intended uses.*
- 2) *The better our work the greater our responsibility.*
- 3) *The lazy and the unproductive will be punished.*
- 4) *God blesses generous sharers and punishes the selfish hoarders.*

Life messages:

1) As young people, and some who are not so young, we should be constantly discerning just what our gifts are and how we can best develop them.

- 2) As students we need to be focusing on developing our talents to the maximum. At this time in our lives, and at this time in the semester one of our greatest priorities should be developing the potential within our lives and discerning how to direct it.
- 3) We need to trust God enough to make use of the gifts and abilities we have been given. We may be especially talented in teaching children, or cooking meals, or repairing homes, or programming computers. So we should ask ourselves how we are using our particular gifts in the service of our Christian community and the wider society. Sometimes this involves risk!
- 4) We need to make use of our talents in our parish. In addition to our homes and families, the best place make use of our talents is in our parish, building up the Body of Christ. Evaluate time, talent, treasure.
- 5) We need to trade with our talent of Christian faith: The way to preserve the faith, or any other talent that God has given us, is to put it to work and make it bear fruit.

Examples: 1) **Play it safe:** There is an old story about two farmers visiting over a fence in early Spring. "Jake," the first one said, "what are you going to plant this year, corn?" "Nope," Jake replied, "scared of the corn borer." "Well, what about potatoes?" his neighbor asked. "Nope, too much danger of potato bugs," announced Jake. The neighbor pressed on, "Well, then, what are you going to plant?" Jake answered, "Nothing! I'm going to play it safe." In today's gospel Jesus tells the story of a lazy servant who buried his talent instead of doing business with it.

2) **The man who did not bury his talent:** Antonio Stradivari was born in Cremona, Italy, in 1644. Because Antonio's voice was high and squeaky, he did not pass the audition for the Cremona Boys' Choir. When he took violin lessons, the neighbors persuaded his parents to make him stop. Yet Antonio still wanted to make music. His friends made fun of him because his only talent was wood-carving. When Antonio was 22 he became an apprentice to a well-known violinmaker, Nicholas Amati. Under his master's training Antonio's knack for carving grew, and his hobby became his craft. He started his own violin shop when he was 36. He worked patiently and faithfully. By the time he died at 93, he had built over 1,500 violins, each one bearing a label that read, "*Antonius Stradivarius Cremonensis Faciebat Anno.....*" ("Antonio Stradivari of Cremona made in the year...") They are the most sought-after violins in the world and sell for more than \$100,000 each. Antonio couldn't sing or play or preach or teach but he used the ability he had, and his violins are still making beautiful music today. Antonio is a challenge to people who have only a single talent and who try to bury the talent for fear of failure -- like the lazy servant in Jesus' parable.

3) **Using one's talents:** Booker T Washington started life as a black American slave. At the age of sixteen, he walked almost five hundred miles from his slave home to Hampton Institute in Virginia. When he got there, he was told that classes were already filled. But that didn't stop him. He took a job at the school doing menial jobs: sweeping floors and making beds and doing anything they wanted, just so he could be around the environment of learning. He did these jobs so well that the faculty found room for him as a student. He worked his way up at the school, became a famous teacher, the first black faculty member at Hampton Institute. He became a writer and the author of *Up from Slavery*. He was a popular public speaker. And he eventually founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. There, he brought in George Washington Carver to teach and do all his research which changed and improved farming techniques. Booker T. Washington used his God-given talents and we have all gained from it.

4) **"Do you want a chance to change the world?":** The late Steven Jobs is the man who founded the enormously successful company called Apple Computer. Jobs decided that Mr. John Sculley was the man needed to help him fulfill his dream of building a completely different kind of computer company, one which would make computers available to every person in the world. However, Mr. Sculley was comfortably and safely entrenched as president of the Pepsico Corporation, the makers of the soft drink Pepsi. In this position, John Sculley had achieved everything that a man could want: power, prestige, public recognition, an enormous salary and a secure future. The thought of a career change requiring a move to the West Coast frightened him. He was concerned about losing pensions and deferred compensation and making the adjustment to living in California, in other words, "the pragmatic stuff that preoccupies the middle-aged." He says, "I was overly concerned with what would happen next week and the week after next." John Sculley knew that he was safe and happy at Pepsico. But he also knew that he had grown to dislike the competitive nature of the business. He knew, as well, how bored he was. Steven Jobs at Apple Computer sensed this. And so he finally confronted his new friend with this pointed question. **He said to John, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?"** That question penetrated deep into the heart and mind of John Sculley. It changed the course of his life. He therefore went to Apple Computer and helped it to grow into one of the most successful corporations in the world. Mr. Sculley's life was changed because he took the risk and decided to invest in himself and others, and to grow. [John Sculley, *Odyssey* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 90.]