



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 19, 2017

St. Mary of the Assumption

Today's Themes in Scripture

Jesus came to establish his kingdom but he knew that his arrival was only the beginning. His kingdom would not be completed by the end of his earthly life, but neither would it end with his death. Jesus promised he would come again, at an unknown time in the future. When he returned, he would pronounce judgement on the world and gather his disciples into his everlasting kingdom. Jesus could not tell them when he would come again, but he tried to help them understand how they were to live while they waited.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable of a wealthy man who, before going away for an extended period of time, gave three of his servants money, presumably to keep his estate running in his absence. Two of the servants took the initiative to invest the money. With their earnings, they had sufficient money to keep the estate running for as long as the owner was away, while their profits added to the estate as well. Out of fear for his master, one servant took no risks with the money given him. He hid the money while his master was gone. Although he returned the money in full, his strategy showed no concern for the master or his estate. The owner was delighted by the two servants who took risks with his money. Their actions demonstrated that they shared the owner's concern for his estate. The owner regarded the fearful servant as lazy and wicked, because he showed little investment in the estate, which supported them all. Jesus' parable asks his disciples to consider how they are using the gifts God has given them while they wait for his return. Will Jesus' servants add to his kingdom, or be content to secure what they have without risking anything to help the kingdom grow?

The Thessalonians were convinced Jesus would come again but they were preoccupied by the time of his return and how it would affect them. St. Paul reminded them that the hour of Jesus' return was not known. They must remember that they are the children of Christ's light and were to live in constant readiness, in the way Jesus taught them to live.

The book of Proverbs ends with a description of an ideal woman. The English translation describes her as a "worthy" wife, but in Hebrew, the woman is honored for her strength. She is committed to her family, competent and industrious, and devoted to charity. Her strength, integrity, and accomplishments are rooted in her love of God. Although this passage is often used as an idealized portrait of a woman, this woman might also provide a fitting example of the way Jesus desires his servants to live as they wait for him. The good and faithful servant will wait for the Lord's return while working to build up his kingdom through tireless and devoted service to others.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

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

The wise woman receives her reward.

- The poem of the first reading is the conclusion of the Book of Proverbs.
- It is very likely that the poem is about both a good wife and Wisdom herself.
- The whole poem highlights the point that whoever finds Wisdom does indeed find life.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 128: 1-2, 3, 4-5.

Blessed are those who fear in the Lord.

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

You are children of the light.

- The Thessalonians were caught between worry over the imminent return of Christ and the complacency in their faith.
- Paul instructed them to be diligent in preparing, but not to worry.
- Christians are children of light.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

We must use the gifts we have been given!

- The Gospel reading deals with the end of the world and the coming of God's Kingdom.
- The paradox of today's parable is that the one who played it safe lost while, in the end, the risk-takers gained.
- Faithfulness implies not only keeping the tradition but also the willingness to risk everything in order to increase God's Kingdom.

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Enjoy the Time of Your Life

Our Scriptures were formed through a process of experience, reflection and oral tradition that was eventually written down, all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Keeping that in mind, we might listen to today's readings as if hearing the oral tradition, as if we were younger disciples listening to our predecessors. Imagine that we're hearing some of the elders who walked with Jesus and heard him weave parables to suit every occasion. These people also knew Paul and the communities he founded.

Suppose we've been sitting around talking about how things are going in the world. As winter looms, we're discussing the signs that make us think our world may not last too much longer. We know the litany: global warming, nuclear proliferation, lack of response to the plight of refugees, masses of people affected by famine, terrorism. Like the early Christians, we feel that Jesus has gone on too long a journey. Some people think he's coming back soon, others say it's too late.

One of the elders reminds us that Paul went through all of that with his communities. Every time folks like the Thessalonians started questioning if they could keep on, every time they tried to pin God down to a time schedule, Paul reminded them that nobody knows when the end will come. He told them not to get too worried, but not to get too comfortable either. A disciple sitting in the back mumbles, "God doesn't give us timetables, but possibilities."

With that, another raises an eyebrow and launches into the parable about the master who left his servants in charge of his fortune while he went away. He gave one servant five million dollars, he gave another two million and a third had to be content with a measly million.

Then, instead of repeating the whole story, our evangelist turns to us and says: "Why are you sitting around grouching and speculating about things you can't control or even guess at? Have you any idea of what you've been given to work with? What are you doing with your millions?"

At this point, one of the women chimes in and asks, "And what do you think is the point of the story? Do you think it's about how much work the servants did? Do you think it's about the profit they made, the risks they took? No, my friends, it's about what they learned and who they became by doing or by ignoring the master's work."

Then, all the elders start speaking at once — and amazingly, they all agree about the parable's message. The point of the story, they tell us, is that two servants learned to love doing what the master did. They had seen him at work and learned to do it the way he did. They even replicated what he had given them. What a surprise to them when the master hardly paid attention to the money but said "Well done! ... Now come share my joy."

Our elders would have us understand that that the master in the story isn't really interested in the money and that God, the Master wants us to experience what the business of this life is all about. Servants who imitate his way of working get caught up in his way of living. By the time the master returns, the servants are already sharing in his joy.

Pity those who refuse to get involved. Given much, they choose not to enjoy it. Unlike servants who respond with gratitude for the opportunities they receive, the unwilling see everything with suspicion. Refusing the trust they are given, they put the master's offer in a grave, suffocating their own potential. As those who get involved in the master's work begin to share his joy even before he returns, the others are grinding their teeth in the darkness even before it's time to render an account.

If we want to imagine the daily life of a joyful servant, we can look to our reading from the Book of Proverbs. The person our translation calls a "worthy wife" is literally described as a "woman of strength" or valiant woman. She is the ideal Israelite. She takes all she has been given, does more with it, and dedicates everything she has and is to the good of those who need her. She is a hard worker, but there is no hint that she feels imposed upon or compelled. She enjoys what she does and that brings joy to others. Following her example, we can learn how to relish the millions of moments that make up the time of our life.

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