

### 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (Nov. 13, 2011)

Two weeks from today is the **first Sunday of Advent**. With it we will begin a **new liturgical year**. The gospel readings last week, today and next week are all part of Matthew's account of what is known as the **apocalyptic discourse of Jesus**. It speaks of the end times and of the judgment that will be part of it.

The parable in today's reading, like the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids that we heard last week, is intended **to alert people** to what is coming and to encourage them to be prepared for it.

**The parable** is simple and straightforward. It reflects the conditions of the world in which Jesus lived. A slave owner of considerable wealth is going on a journey and entrusts to three of his slaves large amounts of money with the understanding that they are to look after and, if possible, to increase it while he is away. We are told that the amount each receives corresponds to his ability. Whereas two, by investing the money, double it, the third does nothing with it and makes no profit on what was entrusted to him. When the master returns, the first two are lauded and rewarded while the third is condemned. He is called wicked and lazy and is thrown into the **outer darkness**, a symbol in the New Testament for divine punishment.

In the time of Jesus, **a talent** represented a large sum of money. It is primarily because of this parable that the word has taken on the meaning it has for us today. This meaning fits perfectly with the point the parable is intended to make. We all have talents, abilities, gifts, opportunities, graces. It may be the family in which we were born, the time when and place where we live out our lives, the education we received, the spouse we married, the children that are ours, the opportunities given to us to contribute to the well being of others.

**The message of the parable** is about using the gifts and opportunities given to us; it is about how we should live our life, about what we are intended to achieve and become in the course of it.

There are many ways **to bury one's talent**. It might be, as in the reading, by laziness or

wickedness. It might be that we make bad decisions, or that we refuse to make the effort required of us. It might be because we remain morally and spiritually immature, that we fail to rise to the challenges and opportunities that are presented to us.

Today's second reading is from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, the earliest of his letters that have come down to us. It reflects something of the **apocalyptic atmosphere** in which Christianity was born. Paul looks forward to the end times and to the return of Christ. That he will return, he is certain. That this will happen soon, is his most fervent hope.

In today's reading, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the end will take place at a moment when it is least expected. "The day of the Lord," he says, "will come like a thief in the night." His message is simple: "let us keep awake and be sober." This, he adds, should not be difficult for believers; they belong not to darkness and night but to day and to the light. What he means by this is that through faith in Christ, we have come to a real if limited knowledge of God and his plan for us, an awareness of the purpose and goal of our lives. To know such things is to understand in a broad sense how we should live.

**Today's first reading** comes from a famous passage in the book of Proverbs. It is a portrait of a **remarkable woman**, a woman praised and cherished by her husband and loved and respected by her children. She embodies traditional Israelite wisdom. She is active and productive, she takes the initiative and gets things done. She is generous to those in need and ready to offer advice to anyone who seeks it from her. She has more than doubled the talents entrusted to her.

Even though the biblical notion of the end times is foreign to us, the liturgy evokes it at the end of every liturgical year in order to remind us of certain fundamental truths. We are **pilgrims in this world**, on our way to somewhere else. As deeply at home in the world as we can sometimes feel, the time allotted to us is brief. What is crucial is that we recognize that this time has been entrusted to us for a purpose and that we must use it and use it well. The most basic truth of our religion is that ultimately we

all have come from God and will one day return to him. When we do, the only thing we will be able to bring with us is ourselves, that is, the self that we have become through all that we have done and failed to do in the course of our lives.

Like the **capable wife** in today's first reading, each of us has his or her own life, his or her own set of possibilities and responsibilities. Our challenge, like hers, is to seize the first and not neglect the second. If we do this consistently and conscientiously, we will walk not in darkness but in light. When our final and definitive encounter with Christ takes place, we will hear him say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the eternal joy of your God."