Reflections on the Readings for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Matthew 25:14-30

In this second (of three) parables in this chapter it is helpful to bear in mind that "talent" in Jesus' time only referred to money, and a lot of it! It would have taken a labourer fifteen years to earn one single talent. In this story the three "servants" (slaves) are not even on the same economic plane as a labourer. Each of them is given an amount of money beyond their wildest dreams – even the one who only received the one talent. Bearing this in mind, the story begins with an incredible generosity shown by the man heading off on his travels. All three would have been well-off. However, whereas two of the servants used the gifted money wisely and well, the other one acted solely out of fear and did something that was a common enough occurrence at the time: if you had something valuable to be kept safe, the best thing to do would be to bury it somewhere safe where only you knew where to retrieve it. The man travelling abroad clearly symbolises God – a very generous God – who does not want people to act out of fear of what has been gifted to them, but to use our gifts.

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

As a youngster in school, you may have been set an exercise in poetry where you write in a vertical column down the left-hand side of the page either all the letters of the alphabet, or perhaps only the letters of your name. The next part of the exercise is to write a line beginning with each of these letters to create a poem. These are known as "acrostics". This Reading comes from such an acrostic poem at the end of the Book of Proverbs. All the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were written down the right-hand side of the page (Hebrew is written from right to left), and then the qualities of a good wife were written against each of the letters. If you think this is typical example of male chauvinism you may want to think again. The speaker in this chapter is, in fact, a woman, the mother of the king who sets forth in this poem the qualities in a woman she expects in any wife for her son. The connection with our Gospel lies in how industrious she is in everything.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Many of our Readings at this time of year have a sense of urgency in the message they convey. The Lord might return at any time, and we should be ready to meet him. All of this might seem rather scary, especially if we are thinking along the lines of a severe judgement to come, but St Paul points to a more positive approach which comes about when we remember that our faith has brought us to live not in darkness but light, and living in that light is what is expected of us at all times.

Prayer

Lord, in thanking you for the many gifts you share with us, may we always use them wisely and well for the benefit of all around us. Amen.