

November 19, 2017

Prov 31:10-13,19-20,30-31; 1 Thes 5:1-6,13; Mt 25:14-30

Last week the wise virgins had prepared for the coming of the bridegroom by having enough oil to keep their lamps burning bright. This week our second reading picks up on the same theme of preparing for the Lord and staying in the light: *For all of you are children of the light and children of the day ... Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.* Remaining in the light is not just a one time thing, remaining alert and sober is not just a one day thing - preparing for the Mater's return requires effort. To be in the light at Jesus' return we have to work to stay in the light. This second reading, and the Gospel today, shows us that something is required on our part - the Christian life is not a spectator sport.

Throughout scripture, and through the life and inspired Tradition of the Church, it is clear that God is calling us to act in certain ways, to do certain things, to live in certain ways in this life. But our culture tells us that we get to define what the boundaries are, we get to decide what we will do with all parts of our lives and all things in our possession, we even get to define who God is. But this is not what Jesus tells us when he says: *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.* We must seek to do the Father's will, not our own. Jesus is clear in this section of Matthew that not all enter eternal life: there are sheep and there are goats, there are those who come into the banquet and those who are left outside, some inherit the kingdom and others do not. It is not doing of the Father's will alone that gains one heaven, but it is through following that will that we learn to love God fully and have a deeper faith in the Lord who saves us.

Today's first reading throws light on that loving and faith-filled relationship God is calling us to. The relationship between God and the faithful is often likened in scripture to a marriage relationship. The wife in the reading who is diligent, who seeks to please her beloved by using her talents and energies to enrich the house - she gains a deeper place in her husband's heart: *When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize.* Notice that she worked hard, not because she feared the husband (that's clear from other parts of this same passage), she worked hard for him in love. Now if we can place ourselves (regardless of gender) as the wife in this image, and God as the husband. If we can not just focus on the acts of the wife in the reading (that would have been

performed by a wife in accent times) but rather replace these with things that we can do to serve the Lord in worship, prayer, and service to Jesus in our neighbor: in our lives, and in our own culture and age. God is pointing out to us that faithful and diligent service - as Jesus says "doing the will of [his] Father" - deepens our faith and love relationship with God.

In the Gospel the man going on a journey entrusts a sum to three servants. Each is given an amount that matches his abilities - no one is being expected to do more than he can reasonably do. The word "talents" that is used makes us think in the English language of personal gifts and skills. It could mean this. In other translations and where this same parable appears in other Gospels it is a sum of money that the master gives. The word "talent" really is a measure of weight. So it can be an amount of coins or precious metal, it can refer to the figurative weight of the gifts we possess, it can also mean a share in the grace of God (which to the Jewish mind is regarded as heavy) - it can symbolize all the gifts God has given us. Regardless of this, each has been given a portion by the master specific to the individual; each knows that one day the master will return. Two of them do something with these "talents" and each one gains in proportion to the amount he risks. One risked and invested five - it grew by five, the other risked three, it grew by three more. The final one did less than the minimum (held it so tight he didn't even let it grow on its own). The master returns and is pleased with the first two, but not the last one.

This last one had in his head how harsh the master was and he acted based on this understanding - the master actually contradicts him when he says *you know I reap where I did not sow*. This is like Jesus saying when Judas' said that he would never betray him: *you say so*. With this same figure of speech, the master is really saying to him that he did not know him at all. The other two risk the sum because they know that the master is merciful, they know that it is only by giving out the sum that it will grow, they know he will forgive if they risk in faith and any gets lost, they know his will. They are not focusing on escaping the master's wrath, but on gaining his love and respect - they have faith in the master. Their gamble pays off - the quantity of those talents grows, and in his love the master rewards them. The other is left out in the cold for his lack of faith, for his fear to use the "talents," for his lack of knowing the the master's will.

Jesus is calling us to discover and invest the "talents" - the quantity of skills, gifts, possessions, money, time, energy, and abilities that he has given to us. He wants us to not fear to use these as he asks, to have faith that through his power they will multiply if risked - as long as we are following the will of the Father. This multiplication enriches our home on Earth (like the faithful wife from the first reading enriches her home) it brings us closer to God in faith, and it enriches us - as Jesus said: *For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich.*