

Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Times

November 18-19, 2017

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

Preacher: Sr. Barbara Moore

Let me make one observation about our first reading and then turn to our Gospel from Matthew.

As I reflected on the first reading with Advent soon to come, my mind went to Mary, the worthy wife who held the heart of Joseph, which he entrusted to her as she entrusted her heart to him.

Imagine the work of her hands as she and Joseph raised their son, and the witness she gave to her family as she extended her arms to the needy.

And now the Gospel...

There is one phrase in the Gospel that sticks in my mind every time I reflect on this parable.

In this story, we hear a slave say to his powerful master when he was reporting back, and giving an account of his work...“Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant, and gathering where you did not scatter.”

The master heard him and repeated his slave’s damning comment.

“You wicked, lazy servant! You knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?” The wicked master admitted his unscrupulous behavior, but wanted his servants to produce profits for him.

Rarely do we see such honesty by such a dishonest person!

Note, Jesus begins the parable with the phrase, “A man going on a journey....” Often parables begin with the phrase, “The Kingdom of God is like....” But this parable does not start that way, and that reality can influence the way we hear and read the text. Not “the Kingdom of God is like....”

For years, preachers have, in my mind, interpreted this text as a statement about the Kingdom of God, but it does not say that! Talents in the minds of some, became gifts to be used to build up the kingdom. But the text does not say that either!

The talents—a substantial amount of money—were distributed to build up the earthy kingdom of the master. The servant who buried his talent (money) out of fear, made a conscious choice. He knew what the master was like, and what he wanted was profit. And so often that profit came at the expense and oppression of the poor.

“Look, you gave me five talents and I made five more.”

Might this “lazy” servant be exercising his right to resist, to refuse to make money off others? Might he, as in the words of the Scripture scholar Barbara Reid, be the one “who blew the whistle on the wickedness of the master?” Indeed he paid a heavy price.

Might the slave have understood that those, “who have more, continue to get more?”

There is another word that the master uses in this parable that is familiar to many of us. The one who did not produce in the eyes of the master was labeled, “lazy.”

That word is often an unspoken attitude that underlies public policy debates about social programs and health care for the poor. Certainly, we all are open to finding many meanings in this parable and that is what they were intended to do.

But the social and excessive profit motive and the punishment for those who try to expose it are quite contemporary. May we be aware of this reality as we try to live out the challenges of the Gospel on a daily basis.

Amen