

A reading from the book of Proverbs.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

A capable wife, who can find her?
She is far more precious than jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.
She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
She girds herself with strength,
and makes her arms strong.
She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband, too, and he praises her:
“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters,
you do not need to have anything written to you.
For you yourselves know very well
that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.
When they say, "There is peace and security,"
then sudden destruction will come upon them,
as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman,
and there will be no escape!
But you, beloved, are not in darkness
for that day to surprise you like a thief.
You are all children of light and children of the day;
we are not of the night or of darkness.
So then let us not fall asleep as others do,
but let us keep awake and be sober.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus spoke this parable to his disciples:

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey,
summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them;
to one he gave five talents,
to another two, to another one,
to each according to his ability.

Then he went away.

The one who had received the five talents
went off at once and traded with them,
and made five more talents.

In the same way,
the one who had the two talents made two more talents.
But the one who had received the one talent
went off and dug a hole in the ground
and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came
and settled accounts with them.

Then the one who had received the five talents came forward,
bringing five more talents, saying,

‘Master, you handed over to me five talents;
see, I have made five more talents.’

His master said to him,

‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave;
you have been trustworthy in a few things,
I will put you in charge of many things;
enter into the joy of your master.’

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying,

‘Master, you handed over to me two talents;
see, I have made two more talents.’



His master said to him,
‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave;
you have been trustworthy in a few things,
I will put you in charge of many things;
enter into the joy of your master.’
Then the one who had received the one talent
also came forward, saying,
‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man,
reaping where you did not sow,
and gathering where you did scatter seed;
so I was afraid,
and I went and hid your talent in the ground.
Here you have what is yours.’
But his master replied,
‘You wicked and lazy slave!
You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow,
and gather where I did not scatter?
Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers,
and on my return
I would have received what was my own with interest.
So take the talent from him,
and give it to the one with the ten talents.
For to all those who have,
more will be given, and they will have an abundance;
but from those who have nothing,
even what they have will be taken away.
As for this worthless slave,
throw him into the outer darkness,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”



SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

As we approach the end of the Church year and Advent draws near, the mood of the liturgy changes perceptibly and becomes eschatological. This is in accord with tradition, for in ancient times Advent started earlier and lasted longer. The Church of England now sensibly designates the last three Sundays of the church year “Sundays before Advent.”

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

Proverbs’ picture of the virtuous woman is a beautiful one, though it is hard to see its connection with today’s other readings. Perhaps the last verse will help us: “Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,” a thought that is found also in the parable of the talents: the profitable servants are given a share in their earnings.

But to concentrate on this point detracts from the main thrust of both readings.

The first reading is a picture of a gracious wife and mother who practices love for both God and neighbor in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call her.

Responsorial Psalm: 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9

The second stanza fits in admirably with the Old Testament reading. It also balances the picture: the God-fearing wife (Pr 31:30) is matched by a God-fearing husband (Ps 128:1, 5).

Note the typically Old Testament concern with the community. Its ideal is not just the happiness of an individual family—the welfare of the family enriches the life of the whole community.

The same thought was present in the second stanza of Pr 31. The graces and virtues of the good housewife are not confined to the home but are extended to the community at large through concern for the poor.

The marriage services emphasize that a Christian home should not be self-centered but should reach out in blessing to the community around it.

Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Paul is apparently replying to a question from his correspondents concerning “the times and the seasons,” that is, the precise date of the parousia, which Paul’s original preaching had led them to expect imminently. Paul rejects the inference. There is one thing they need to know: the end will come suddenly (cf. Mk 13:32 and Acts 1:6-7).

Despite these warnings of Scripture, however, curiosity over the date of the end has continued to exercise the minds of Christians ever since, and ignorant and unscholarly fanatics claiming to know the date of the parousia can always win a ready hearing.

But the Book of Revelation is about events in the first century, not the twentieth century or any other. The experience of history shows that announcements of the exact date of the end have invariably been proven wrong. As fundamentalists, such fanatics should take 1 Thes 5:1-6, Mk 13:32, and Acts 1:6-7 to heart!

Jesus' parable of the thief in the night (Mk 13:35 par.; Lk 12:39f.) is one that the Thessalonians apparently knew already (1 Thes 5:2)—an interesting indication that Paul may have transmitted more Jesus tradition than the letters suggest. By citing this parable, Paul elevates the parousia hope from one of curious speculation to one of existential attitude. The Christian must always live on tiptoe, as if the parousia were coming at any moment.

But there is more to it than “as if.” In a manner typical of his teaching (cf. Rom 13:11-14), Paul insists that the End has in some sense already come. Christian believers are already children of the light and the day. The imperative is based on an indicative: Be what you are, children of the light and the day.

Here is the final answer to the fanaticism of parousiac excitement. It is not a matter for idle curiosity but one of living here and now in the power of the future that we have already begun to participate in through baptism.

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

When I read the short form of this gospel, I rubbed my eyes in astonishment. Is the reading meant to stop at Mt 25:20? Surely it should at least include Mt 25:21. Otherwise the caption refers to nothing in the text. Hopefully the long form will be used lest the reading lose its whole point. [Webmaster note: the short form in the Second Typical Edition of the Lectionary ends with verse 21.]

As with the parable of the ten virgins, we may distinguish three stages in the history of the tradition:

1. At the Jesus level it was a story told from life. The owner of an estate had to go on a long journey, so he left his money to three servants in trust, lest it remain idle during his absence. Two of them put it to wise use, made capital gains, and were commended by the master on his return. But a third servant carefully hoarded it and, on the master's return, gave him back the exact sum he had been entrusted with. Instead of commending the third servant for his caution, the master rebuked him and handed the money over to the most enterprising of the three servants.

When Jesus first told this story, he must have applied it to something quite concrete in his ministry. Perhaps he was condemning the Jewish religious authorities. They were like the third servant, so carefully bent on preserving in its purity the tradition with which they had been entrusted that they lost their openness for new things and refused to accept Jesus' message.

2. In the early community the parable was moralized by the addition of the maxim “For to all those who have, more be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” In addition, the parable was allegorized. The master was equated with Christ, his departure with the ascension, and his delayed return with the delay of the parousia. The words “enter into the joy of your master” are inserted so that the reward becomes participation in the messianic banquet.

3. Matthew places the parable in his sequence of parables following the Synoptic apocalypse that culminates with the Son of Man coming to judge the church. The faithful servant now stands for those Christians who hear the teaching of Christ and follow it; the unprofitable servant represents those who do not keep the new law enunciated by Jesus for the church.

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