

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 15 November 2020

“World Day of the Poor”

Scriptures: Proverbs 31:10-13,19-29,30-31; 1Thessalonians 5:1-6; Matthew 25:14-30

Like last weekend, we again have a parable, one of the last in the Gospel prior to the narrative of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Why parables, you might ask? Parables are notorious for turning upside down the expected order of things, and this one is no exception. The high-risk takers are rewarded for their audacity; the prudent one is punished. It is clear that playing safe with God’s gift is not an option in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew’s Gospel was probably written for a group of Christians who had been expelled from the synagogue for following Jesus’ teaching. Some would have tried to lie low, play safe, and hope the trouble passed by. Perhaps Matthew used the parable to encourage the fearful to risk everything for the kingdom of God, where the rewards would be spectacularly high.

Parables speak to us today. And we do wonder how this parable can do so. Perhaps the clue is in the reward. Those who took risks are not given extra talents; they are praised identically for being good and faithful servants, and they are invited to come and share their master’s happiness. The one who played it safe, risking nothing for his master, is deprived of his talent and cast out.

The emphasis is on the positive, however. This parable reminds us that we have been given much by God. We do not have the option of not using our gifts to build God’s kingdom. Whatever we invest, the promised reward is to share in the happiness of the master’s kingdom.

It is, indeed, a very engaging and encouraging thought to pursue during this month and the past months when our prayers are for those who are suffering and those who have died in the coronavirus pandemic worldwide. We pray for them and for ourselves, secure in the promise that if we commit to the kingdom of God, we can look forward to a life that takes us into the fullness of God's life itself. It is the perfection of anything we could ever hope for.

It was three years ago, in November 2017, that Pope Francis established the "World Day of Poor" to be celebrated yearly on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, in the liturgical calendar, as the last concrete sign of the Extraordinary Holy Year which had the theme of mercy.

With the "World Day of the Poor" Pope Francis exhorts the Church and the world to a "pastoral conversion to be a witness of mercy".

Pope Francis explained the meaning of this special annual celebration in relation to the mysteries of Jesus Christ: "It will be the best preparation to live the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the little ones and with the poor, and who will judge us on the works of mercy (cf. *Matthew* 25:31-46).

Pope Francis further explained the objectives of the Day of the Poor. "It will be a Day that will help communities and each baptized person to reflect on the way in which poverty is at the heart of the Gospel, and on the fact that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our home (*Luke* 16:19-21) there cannot be justice or social peace".

Pope Francis titled his message for the World Day of the Poor: "Let us love, not with words but with deeds."