**33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A**

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

November 18/19, 2017

When we were conceived in our mother’s womb, God gave us certain “talents” or abilities to fit a particular plan he has for our lives. He gives us a kind of natural ability to trust others, hope, and to care for others that care about us. When we were baptized, we were given three supernatural gifts, namely the virtues of faith, hope, and love, which prepare us to believe, hope, and love in extraordinary ways. These virtues have been infused into our very beings by the Holy Spirit who lives with us because of our baptismal grace. Although each of us has received these virtues, when life becomes difficult we all struggle with one or more of them.

Sometimes, when faced with difficult realities of life, we think things like, “I have no gifts. I have nothing to offer. There is no special plan for me.” Or we may think, “Yes, I am talented. I have a lot because I earned it. My riches, my talents, my abilities are a result of my effort. What I have comes from me, not God.” At times like these, we push God out of the picture, and we struggle with faith.

Sometimes, we are strong in faith, but we are fearful. We are afraid of God. We slip into thinking God is harsh and punishing, like the man in the Gospel today thought. So, when we see our talents, we don’t want to risk losing what we have been given, so we go out and bury our talents. We wonder if Go is really invested in us, interested in us, and will provide for us. We struggle with the virtue of hope.

Sometimes, we believe in God, k now we have gifts and talents, and we may even have a cheerful, hopeful outlook in life, but we don’t invest our talents with others. We invest only in ourselves. We do not give back what has been given to us. We struggle with the virtue of love.

Sometimes, we have a strong faith, know that God loves us and that he has given us all that we have, and we are filled with gratitude. What does gratitude do? It increases our love for others, so we use our talents to bring about God’s plan in our lives. We become the good and wise stewards we hear about in the Gospel today.

My friends, God has created each of you for a unique purpose, and given you certain talents that are to be used, not buried. The talents he has given you are needed by others. You have been chose by God. God has infused in you the virtues of faith, hope, and love to help you. You can accomplish great things in his eyes. Do not be surprised if you struggle with one or more of those virtues at times in your lives. We all do. God has given us so much and we must give it all back to him, with interest. In other words, we must invest in others, in our parish, in our local community, in the larger Church and world, because this is how we are to fulfill God’s commandment, “Love God and love each other.”

To conclude, a brief comment about the closing verses in today’s Gospel where we hear of being cast into the darkness with wailing and grinding of teeth. Scary words. We will be cast into the darkness only if we deliberately and definitively choose to deny God’s love and mercy. Deliberately and definitively refusing to believe and hope in God’s love and failing to love others will lead to eternal loneliness, which is hell, and no one can make that decision for you except you. In the end, there will be love, which we will either accept or deny. Until then, there is always hope. So, no matter what you life may look like today, if we choose to believe in God’s love, hope in his mercy, and love him by offering back to him what he has given us, we will not be left in the darkness, but will be with him in light, as St. Paul says in today’s second reading. The choice to love, the greatest of the virtues, is always before us. We can choose to believe, hope, and love.

Whether you have five talents, or two, or one, rejoice, be grateful, see in them the sign of God’s love for you, his plan for your life, and invest your talents by loving others. Live with faith, hope, and love… in other words, live a full life, and then return it all to the Lord. Give him the praise. Your reward will be great in heaven.