

TRINITY 23 – 2020

Prov 31:10-13; 19-20; 30-31

1Thess 5:1-6

Mt 25:14-30

Today's first reading asks a dangerous question, "Who can find a good wife?" I refuse to answer this question and defer to the author of Proverbs who suggests that a good wife is one who works for good and not evil and so brings balance and contentment in the family. The point being made is that we should do the best we can with the resources that we have and do so with diligent care and purity of heart.

The Sunday readings leading into Advent make it clear that love cannot be forced on anyone. Even God cannot do that. We either accept or reject love that is offered to us, but we will find it difficult to love others if we have never experienced love *from* others.

Today's gospel reading tells us something about God's love for us. The master gives money to three servants and tells them to use it wisely and profitably for his benefit. Two servants do so and are rewarded for their efforts. The third one returns the money with no profit or interest attached. He said he was afraid of failing in the task because the master had very high expectations. This servant allowed the fear of failure to paralyse him.

Fear can be devastating because it can prevent us from making decisions or entering or leaving relationships. It can cripple us in the workplace and decimate any sense of self-worth that we may have. It can prevent us from accepting and responding to God's love and his will for us because we think we cannot meet his expectations.

The reaction of the master to the third servant was not one we would expect. He said that fear of failure should in fact spur us on to greater effort rather than blaming others. The tendency to blame others was launched by Adam and Eve and is the curse that has created chaos out of order ever since.

The other servants were rewarded because they did their best with what they were given, and that is what God expects of us. He expects us to remain faithful, to be prepared to take risks and to do our best with the gifts that he has given us. The worst we can do as a disciple is let fear paralyse us.

The Thessalonian Christians were beginning to lose their nerve because they expected Jesus to return very shortly after his ascension. St Paul assures them that those who remain faithful will have nothing to fear at the judgement, so they should get on with their ministry of preaching and living the gospel of Jesus and his resurrection.

Advent is close, and once again the Ordinariate will be holding its appeal to support those who are in formation for the priesthood and permanent diaconate. We need well formed clergy and Religious who are committed to God, the Church and the Ordinariate. We need priests who are already ordained to minister in the Ordinariate, but they must be acceptable

to the Ordinariate and be compatible with the parish where they are appointed by the Ordinary to serve.

In 1988 Pope St John Paul II wrote that “evangelisation was not only the responsibility of the clergy and Religious, but in a particular way is the task of the lay person living in the world” (*Christifideles Laici 1988*). While clergy and Religious are essential in working alongside the laity and offer them resources and teaching, the initiative to evangelise belongs to *all* disciples of Jesus. Fear is the great paralysing force, so we need to carry these words from Isaiah in our hearts, “*Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand*” (*Isaiah 41:10*).

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