

e-Good News

The Gospel of Matthew



November is a traditional time of remembering our loved ones who have gone before us.

The final three Gospels of the liturgical year focus on the end of time. This was the theme of Jesus' final discourse on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem (Matthew 24-25). Jesus is inviting us all to be ready and to be prepared. Preparation for many ceremonies and occasions take place in all of our parishes and lives. November is a traditional time of remembering our loved ones who have gone before us. November is a time when winter has arrived. It is a time of bleakness - a time to consider our direction and to look for signposts on our path to God. Our Liturgical year ends with the celebration of Christ the King. As we continue to welcome Jesus into our lives, let us use November to reflect on the challenge of keeping his words alive in our life. Reaching out in compassion to people around is a natural expression of faith in Jesus. Walking in obedience to Jesus and loving our neighbour leaves no place for being indifferent to the needs of others.

Sunday 6th November - 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Parable Of The Wise And Foolish Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

At this point in the liturgical year, the lectionary turns to the end of time and the teaching on watchfulness. Our parable today is unique to Matthew, although there are passages in Mark and Luke which resembles it.

Sunday Reflection

- 1 Kingdom of *heaven* is a Matthean expression. The nuptial imagery is established immediately.
- 2 We are told this immediately that an attentive reader will "hear" the comparison of the wise woman and the foolish woman from the wisdom books of the Bible.
- 5 Delay is a theme of Matthew at this point. It reflects the experience of the delay of the *parousia* and a consequent dilution of expectation and readiness. The early church was settling down! See 24:8.
- 6 Midnight measures the delay-i.e. into the night, but not *that far* into the night.
- 8 Outside the parable, the request might seem logical.
- 9 The refusal has behind it a conviction about personal engagement.
- 10 The shutting of the door is a hard saying. The image comes up already in 24:13.
- 11 "Lord, Lord" is used elsewhere in this Gospel in the warning: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?'" (Matthew 7:21-22)
- 12 The previous citation continues: "Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'" (Matthew 7:23)
- 13 Day and hour occurs elsewhere (Matthew 20:12; 24:36, 50; 25:13). Not knowing and watchfulness features in these chapters in Matthew.



POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1 In my own experience, what are the things I have learned for myself that I have to do for myself? More personally: what does the Lord *hope for* from me?
- 2 The dimming of expectation implied in the parable can express the dimming of our commitment and engagement. What things have contributed to my own loss of original excitement? What has helped me to regain it?
- 3 The parable expresses the experience of opportunity taken and opportunity missed. What is my own experience of taking and missing opportunities, perhaps in my personal life, perhaps in ministry?
- 4 In part, the parable is meant to frighten, or at least disturb deeply, especially with the dreadful words "I do not know you". It is a kind of negative energy for engagement. Have I known this in my own experience of the faith?
- 5 The invitation to keep watch speaks today. The privileged bearing of the good news can become routine, even professionalised, and surely there is more to it than that!

Prayer

ALMIGHTY and ever-living God,
remove the obstacles that stand in our way,
that unimpeded in body and soul
we may freely devote ourselves to your service.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Sunday 13th November - 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Parable Of The Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

Sunday Reflection

- 3 Temporary absence, which happened with the rulers in Palestine.
- 4 A talent is an unusually large sum of money, about fifteen years wages.
- 5 This is risk-taking, which is recommended for the gospel!!
- 6 Same as v 5.
- 7 This person takes no risks.
- 8 The long delay has an allegorical meaning that is the delayed second coming of Christ.
- 9 A positive result.
- 10 Unreserved praise, which is unusual in the Bible.
- 11 The same again.
- 12 The same.
- 13 The projection on to the master is an avoidance of responsibility.
- 14 The plain return is exactly what God does not want of us.
- 15 Unreserved condemnation.
- 16 At least this passive activity - might not seem so secure these days!!
- 17 Judgment is immediate.
- 18 A paradoxical teaching at the service of the main message.
- 19 Outer darkness and grinding of teeth are typical expressions of Matthew.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1 Jesus was angry at the way the Jewish leaders treated God's gift of revelation to his people. They had buried it when it was intended to grow and be life-giving to all. The resources of this earth are God's gift to us. Perhaps, like Jesus, you have a passion to see a fairer distribution of the goods of this world.
- 2 One of the ways the leaders had buried God's gift was by putting strict observance of a multiplicity of rules at the centre of religious practice rather than a deep faith and trust in the forgiving love of God. What part have rules played for you in your life? Have they been life-giving?
- 3 Sometimes we can get a lesson on what is truly important in life from the example of people who are living in circumstances that on the surface are unorthodox, unconventional, and sometimes irregular. What lessons have you learned from such witness?
- 4 On the level of our own personal life, faith is not given to us to be locked away, but to be "traded" with. We trade with it when we believe in its value, trust it, and use it, bringing it into the experiences we have in daily life. Can you recall times when relying on your faith has brought you rewards?
- 5 Likewise with our own personal gifts and talents. We can fall into the trap of seeing these as our personal possession so that we can do with them as we like, rather than share them as gifts so that they can be multiplied. What is your experience of hoarding or sharing your own gifts? When did you feel most alive?
- 6 The master in the story is also someone we can celebrate. He is the kind of person who does not cling to power. He entrusts his property (his cause) to others. Perhaps you have known leaders who have done this? Have you done it yourself? As parents have you entrusted the lives of your children to them so that they can find life to the full by taking responsibility for their own lives?



Prayer

O GOD,
from whose own abundance,
all gifts and skills are lavishly bestowed,
encourage us to use our talents
as generously as you have allotted them,
so that, being faithful to your purpose,
we may become sharers in your glory.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
Amen.

Sunday 20th November - Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King

When did we see you naked?

Matthew 25:31-46

This parable is found only in Matthew and needs a careful reading.

Sunday Reflection

Broadly speaking, the remarks made last week set the ground for reading the parable, so that no detailed comment is necessary.

Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?". Then he will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to the least of these, you neglected to do it to me".



O GOD, whose image we bear
and whose name we carry,
yours in the world and all it contains.
Recall us to our true allegiance,
so that above the power and rulers of this world
you alone may claim our fullest loyalty and love.
We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Amen.



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POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1 This judgment scene contains surprises for us. One is that nobody is condemned for doing wrong, but for their failure to do good. Jesus is telling us that being his disciple is a positive choice about how we live and relate to others. Perhaps sin-avoidance has sometimes dominated your view of what was being asked of you. What difference has it made for you when you viewed your Christian life as a daily opportunity to make a positive difference to others?
- 2 Another way of saying this is that the aim of Christian living is not me-centred (about my personal sanctification) but other-centred (about responding to the needs of others). What happens to you when you get caught up yourself? Is your life not better, and often more enjoyable, when you can look beyond yourself to others?
- 3 The standard of love and concern that Jesus presents challenges us to look beyond our comfort zone to those who are most in need. Who are those most in need in your world? When have you been able to move beyond your comfort zone in reaching out to them?
- 4 Another surprise is to hear Jesus tell us that when we do something for another, he considers it as done to himself. When has seeing Christ in others helped you in your dealings with them?
- 5 The story is about the judgment of the whole of humanity. It presents an ideal of society in which human relationships at all levels are governed by the law of love. In your experience what difference has it made to a group to which you belonged when there was a definite sensitivity to the needs of all members?

