

# 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Year

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Next week, when we celebrate the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, we hear the familiar story of Son of Man coming in glory at the end of time – the separating of the sheep and the goats according to how we have lived our lives. When we listen to today's Gospel, it is important for us to realise that the parable of the talents leads directly into the picture of the Last Judgement. It is not simply a story told to remind us of God's gifts, and the need to use them well. It has a sense of urgency to it. When the Master returns he will expect an account of what we have done with our lives.

When the master distributes his funds to his servants, he gives them no explicit instructions. Are they to keep the money secure? Or should they invest the money? Does the master expect them to benefit the poor and needy? Should they purchase land or use it to trade? Had they been instructed to invest the money, the third servant's failure would have been disobedience. As it is, his failure is being lazy and useless—doing nothing while awaiting the return of the master.

By contrast, the first two servants are called faithful because they are productive. Being a faithful servant requires more than narrow obedience – doing no more and no less than we are asked: it requires initiative, resourcefulness, and productivity. The Master expects his servants to use their imagination. They know what sort of man he is. Servants who use productively what has been entrusted to them need fear no judgment for, when the Master returns, they will share their Master's joy.

God entrusts so much to each one of us – material goods, health, intelligence, knowledge, practical skills, our personality, our connections with others through family, or social links. He does not dictate to us how to use these gifts – he leaves that to our discretion. He does expect us to know that he will look for us to have used all these things well and fruitfully. At the end of our lives he will look into our eyes and we will have to explain to him what we have done.

We sometimes think that furthering God's kingdom requires great and dramatic acts. The first reading reminds us that simple, ordinary, everyday tasks are, indeed, great acts because they, too, further God's kingdom. This will be spelt out even more clearly in next Sunday's Gospel. The virtuous will ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?" The Lord will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

Pope Francis has asked that this Sunday be kept in future as a Day of the Poor. He challenges us to go beyond good deeds and a desire for justice to encounter the poor in a personal way "to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude". We are called to follow Christ in his poverty who set aside his privileges as Son of God to share our human nature in weakness and poverty.

Often what we lack is not good will, but the imagination and motivation to seize the opportunities offered. We tend to be better at preparing for the short term than long term planning. Things suddenly creep up on us! Because Christ's Second Coming seems remote, we don't see being prepared as urgent. We are surrounded by opportunities – those who are bereaved, lonely, isolated for all sorts of reasons. If we reach out to them, if we seek to use every moment as well as we can, even times of rest and recreation, then he will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant... come and join in you Master's happiness."