

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Proverbs 31.10-13, 16-18, 20, 26, 28, 31)

Women in the Scriptures

The Gospel parable is about a man who is a wise administrator, and this first reading delicately pairs it with a woman who is a shrewd business-woman, running her household and her cottage industry capably, wisely and generously in reverence for the Lord.

The Bible is often felt to be unduly male oriented (an accusation often made also against the Church), and this was the normal state of society in those days. Nevertheless, a succession of remarkable women moves through the pages of the Old Testament, real partners to their husbands, and often providing the motive force in pursuit of God's promises.

In the New Testament, too, besides Mary and Jesus' female followers in the Gospels, we see Jesus valuing women. Particularly the playful scenes between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the Canaanite (or Syro-Phoenician) woman spring to mind. Especially in Paul's letters and apostolate women - Chloe, Phoebe, Junia - play important roles, even leadership roles, working with Paul to establish his communities. The first convert to Christianity in Europe was a woman, Lydia.

Question:

Do you think the Bible is unduly male oriented?

Second reading:

(1 Thessalonians 5.1-6)

A Thief in the Night

Paul had obviously taught the new Christians at Thessalonika that Christ had conquered death, so that death had no more grasp on Christians. So they were puzzled that Christians nevertheless died.

Paul explains in the letter that Christians who have died will be the first to rise up and join the returning Christ in his triumphant procession. Only after them will come those who are still alive.

However, Paul's principal stress is on the unpredictability of the Day of the Lord, that final day when the Lord will set right all injustices. It makes little difference whether I meet the Lord in some sort of imagined vast Judgment Day, or whether my meeting with the Lord is merely personal at my own death. I know that I will not be ready - if only I had just a little more time to prepare! - and that I will not be in a fit state to face the glorious, pure wonder of Divine Love.

The day will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night or the pains of childbirth, with that same finality and inescapability.

Question:

What will be your reaction on meeting God?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 25.14-30)

A Story about Talents

It is encouraging to think of all the talents that friends and neighbours have and that I don't have. It is all part of the gifts of the Spirit, which Paul sees as making up the whole Body of Christ. Everyone has a special contribution to make.

As for me, it is extraordinary that God created me with all my twists, defects, fears and failures, and it is precisely because of those boils, sores, abscesses that God loves me, helps me and guides me to work out my salvation. And it is just possible that there may be friends who can think that God has given me talents that make a tiny contribution to the happiness and goodness of the world.

What of the man who has only one 'talent', digs it into the earth, and is so severely treated? This is surely someone who resolutely turns his (or her) back on the goodness she (or he) has received and refuses to work with it for the Lord's purposes or anyone else's. Such a talent goes to waste and merely rusts and corrupts. If I know anyone like that it is just worth asking whether, with infinite and patient kindness, I can help that person to release the talent and bring it to blossom.

Question:

What are your chief talents and how do you use them?
