

Thirty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 19, 2017
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

You might have noticed the book set up by the baptismal font. In the month of November, we're invited to record those who have died over the past year. This way we can pray for them as a parish community. The book is brought forward with the offertory. At that time, we're offering our prayers for the dead to God the Father; our memories, our love and our hope. November is the time to consider the four last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell. Immediate judgement occurs when each one dies. It lays bare in the light of Christ the truth of our relationship with God; the consequences of the good we've done; the good that we've failed to do.

How are we in our fallen state able to do any good at all? The answer is God. Through no merit of our own, due solely to his gratuitous mercy, he gives us forgiveness and makes us just through baptism. We cooperate with this grace, yet our choice to cooperate is itself a gift. But once made just, we can merit the graces needed for salvation; our own and that of others. In a strict sense, God owes us nothing. But he adopts us and makes us his children; more than servants, we are heirs; more than slaves, we are brothers of Christ. In the words of St. Augustine, "Grace has gone before us; now we are given what is due (2009)." God's justice is mercy, and he chooses to owe us more than we deserve.

Prov 31:10-13, 16-18, 20, 26, 28-31
Ps 128
1 Thes 5:1-6
Mt 25:14-30

Today's Gospel is an image of judgement; a consideration of what has been done with the graces that he has given. The first to be judged was given five talents and made five more. Long life is a blessing, but isn't necessary to achieve a holiness that transforms the world. St. Therese of Lisieux only lived until the age of 24, but her little way of love captivated the war-torn world of a century past. She didn't care about the tally of her merits and talents, but wanted only to be in the possession of God, held in the hands of Jesus who charged her actions with supernatural power. "After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your love alone. In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own justice and to receive from your love the eternal possession of yourself (St. Therese of Lisieux, 2011)."

The second to be judged was given two talents and made two more. Canonization is a blessing, but isn't necessary to be a saint. Many of us remember our grandparents, their lives of quiet faith, whose prayers on our behalf brought us into the peace of Christ. "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

The third to be judged was given one talent, but hid it away out of fear; he fell to desolation and despair. "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did now sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground." With the talent hidden away, he failed in his main task; to learn the truth of the master who is love. In desolation he turned to what is low and earthly; without confidence, hope or love; lazy, tepid and sad; separated from light and cast in darkness (St. Ignatius of Loyola, #4). Desolation does beset us from time to time. But God always gives us sufficient grace to do his will. With it we can persevere in patience, buoyed by the certain hope of consolation to come; performing meritorious works with trust, but never feeling alone. The master said, "you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest." We can reveal our temptations and failures to our confessor, talking about our barriers to Christ, breaking the spiritual silence that holds in us chains (St. Ignatius of Loyola, #13). Because the ending might surprise us. Every week, we lose another rock star, and it's an unexpected shock. "There is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!"

Paul's comparison is apt. He told the Ephesians that the Church is the Bride of Christ: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25)."

As his bride, we are called to use the graces given to us, cooperating with them for the salvation of the world. The first reading tells us about the good wife. "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she buys a vineyard." Through grace we grow the Church in fruitful charity and wisdom. "She opens her hands to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue."

We're little grapes and little olives, abiding in the love of Christ; precious, important and treasured; bound into one by the Eucharist that we receive; awaiting the justice of God that will far exceed the injustice of his creatures. So for this Eucharist, "You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you."