Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 15, 2020  
Reflection by Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB  
Proverbs 31:10-13; Psalm 128; I Thess 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30

We ask ourselves over and over again - what do these strange times that we live in, mean? Or even what does this calendar year of 2020 mean for our future? What are we to learn as a people of God as our country deals with divisions and joblessness and increasing poverty, as well as imploding from a suppressed history of the oppression of black and brown people, and as we all experience a health crisis in which we are urged to act so differently than we have been taught to do – to distance ourselves from others….to hide our faces….to limit our social gatherings….to learn to communicate through technology….. What will history say about the year 2020 and beyond? What will we say when we stop to record these conflicting experiences?

When I first read the texts for today, it was the Entrance antiphon that I pondered:

_I think thoughts of peace and not of affliction._

How does that speak to our current situation as we long for peace and experience affliction?

Liturgically, we are nearly at the end of our church year. The liturgical year is designed to help us open up through our rituals and our reflections to what the kindom of God could mean in our lives, in our times. Today’s readings offer some hints, through a description of what it means to be a good wife (I did not choose to go there.), through the letter of Paul to the people of Thessalonica in which he warns them of coming trouble –

_(When people are saying ‘Peace and security’ then sudden disaster comes upon them…..)_

- and of their reality as children of the light and children of the day.

…and particularly the gospel parable that, if read with a questioning approach, might help us reflect on our own situation with a bit of a different approach.

We, too often, have read the parables as allegories where we can name the message by recognizing what each character clearly represents. This particular parable has seen this inclination spelled out over the centuries.

I, and maybe you, have often seen this parable as a lesson and an invitation to use my gifts well, not to hide my talents or even bury them and to recognize the dictum at the end that the one who has will be given more. That is not a bad life lesson to learn.

However, we know that the teachings of the parables are not meant to be that obvious even though those taken as clear allegory do teach us some lessons.
Three weeks of parables are given to us to help us prepare for the end of the liturgical year, to think about the end of time, to help us live out this time of waiting, for the end time:

- First, we heard the tale of the ten virgins that Pat explored and explicated last Sunday.
- Then, in today’s parable of the 3 servants (or slaves as some translate the word) we are given another familiar way to perhaps look at our current time as well as at how the parable points us toward the end time.
- And, next Sunday in the parable of the last judgment with the King separating the sheep from the goats (those who fed the hungry …..from those who did not…).

What do these parables clarify for us?

Today’s parable uses economic images, in fact, they are capitalistic images of making money off of money, of earning interest (forgotten by the Church as she condemned usury for so long a time).

Did Jesus really commend making more and more money in this life?

Is the Master to represent God? Is this greedy and vengeful master an image we have of God?

Why did the master go on such a long journey and entrust his possessions to others and leave his wealth behind? How come the first two individuals doubled what they received and then did nothing more?

Why was the master so harsh on the 3rd person and so affirming of the first two? Is the gospel really praising capitalism’s victories?

Why did Matthew end this selection with a commendation of the first two people in the story and the punishment / banishment of the third?

Why does this passage (in both Matthew and Luke) praise those who actively invest their money? You may have even more questions than I.

What did the 3rd person really know about his boss?

Barbara Reid OP and a Maryknoll missioner whose homily I read both suggest that one message of this parable might lie in probing the third servant’s response.
My questions this time led me to focus on that 3rd individual who confronts his master by saying –

\[
\text{I knew you were a demanding person,} \\
\text{harvesting where you did not plant and} \\
\text{gathering where you did not scatter;} \\
\text{so out of fear} \\
\text{I went off and buried your talent in the ground.} \\
\text{Here is it is back.}
\]

And the master responds…..**So you knew** that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?

This 3rd servant told the truth and the boss recognized that truth and was ashamed. The man was punished and banished. He suffered dire consequences for telling the truth?

*Out of fear…I went off and buried what you gave me.* We know that “fear” in our Scriptures is not used as dread or a feeling of being terrified. According to Father Don Senior, the Greek term “phobos” which is translated into Hebrew and there means respect, reverence or awe. If we read this response in light of that meaning of “fear”, we might look at this third individual differently. What did it mean when he admitted his “fear”?

This person spoke the truth and took the consequences.

What happens when I tell the truth? I have to face the consequences and sometimes those consequences are very different than I might have expected. I open myself up to risk….sometimes to rejection……

What truth needs to be spoken today in our world, in our racially divided and hurting society? In our various senses of what is real, what is factual, what is truth? In the deeply disturbing growing chasm between those who are rich and those who are poor? In those who find war and division and strife to be the only way toward their own truth?

As in any good reading of the Scriptures, we are left with many questions …..

Perhaps we are called to discern the truth and to speak it as we can. Paul’s reminder and the words of the entrance antiphon might give us some sense of our own truth as followers of Christ:

\[
\text{We are not in darkness….} \\
\text{children of light….of day….} \\
\text{Let us stay alert and sober.} \\
\text{We can… think thoughts of peace and not of affliction.}
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