

# THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

November 16, 2008

*Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-6; Matthew 25: 14-30*

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## A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

There is so much happening economically and politically in our world that an easy temptation would be to side with the poor man who received one thousand pounds and tucked them safely away so that he would lose nothing of his master's money. As Wall Street continues its yo-yo swing and banks and financial companies close and merge, the age-old desire to keep one's wealth close at hand (under the mattress, perhaps) becomes ever more attractive.

Today's Gospel passage, however, uses money as an image, not as a financial lesson. The focus of the parable is rather on the gifts, the abilities that we have each been given and the admonition to use them well. Despite the wealth of experience that would suggest otherwise, there is still a deep-seated fear within us that in sharing from our abundance we will somehow be less. And so we are often reluctant to share the material goods that we have and perhaps are even more afraid to share our gifts of nature and grace.

The "worthy wife" of today's first reading is ample proof of the abundance that comes from and returns to a generous heart. Not only is this woman a blessing to her family, she is also a blessing to the community, as she reaches out beyond her immediate household to the poor and needy. In return she is honored "at the city gates"; this is high praise, indeed. For us who do not live in gated cities and would think of an entrance to a city as a place removed from the action of the day, in the ancient times recorded in Proverbs military operations and business deals were conducted at the entrance to the community. This is where people gathered to keep abreast of what was going on. The news of her good work has reached this significant place and that work is recognized in this place that served as the media hub of the day.

The reading from the first letter to the Thessalonians underscores the importance of all of us making the best use of the time and talents that we are given. When Thessalonians was written, there was a belief that Jesus was to return very soon (as one professor was fond of saying, "The people of the time believed he [Jesus] was coming back a week from Tuesday." Time proved that to be incorrect. But, today we know so little of our own times and what they will bring; we know so little even of today and what that will bring. And so we must "stay alert," eager and willing to do the Lord's bidding in the here and now of our lives.

By the time we hear the Gospel reading we have been prepared for its message of making the best use we can of what we have. That abundance comes from sharing and using things to the best of our ability is clearly evident in the financial negotiations of the first two stewards we meet. Christ's life as he moved from city to city and town to town was such a positive model of this. Perhaps this is seen most clearly in the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The people who reclined to eat were fully satisfied with what they received; in the end of the baskets (whether they were 12 or 7) were still full.

We gather this morning as a Christian community around the table of the Lord. Here will be nourished at his banquet; we will have more than enough to leave our place of worship, becoming bread and drink for others. This is how we are called to turn our world upside down.