



Thirty Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)

HOMILY

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Sunday 19 November, 2017

Next Sunday we will celebrate the Feast of Christ the Universal King, and so begin the last week of our liturgical year. The following Sunday, December 3, will be the First Sunday of Advent and the Church will invite us to turn our minds to the imminent coming of the Lord. While the shops have been full of Christmas decorations for some time now, and perhaps many of you have already started your preparations for the family celebration of Christmas, the First Sunday of Advent will be a time for us, as a community of disciples of Jesus, to consider how we will ensure that he, Jesus, is at the heart of our preparations and at the heart of our celebrations. We will, after all, be celebrating his birth. Without this Christmas is emptied of any real depth, or any real significance in our journey through life.

As we move towards the end of our liturgical year, the Church, through its liturgy and especially the scriptural readings, urges us to reflect on what in our tradition we often refer to as the "Last Things": death, judgment, heaven and hell.

Each of these words has the power to conjure up anxiety, uncertainty and fear, and for this very reason we often prefer not to give too much attention to them. Many of us would, in a sense, prefer our religion to be only about the way we are meant to live in this life: only about how to make our lives more enriching, more fulfilling, more loving, more deeply and truly human. This is a profound human instinct and in its essence is part of God's gift of life to us. God has given us the gift of life so that we can flourish, growing each day more fully into the people God has created us to be. Our Christian faith, and the way we in our long Catholic tradition understand it, offers us a way of life which, if we follow it, will indeed lead to this human flourishing - not just our own, but also that of all we come in contact with.

But as those of us know who have lived through the experience of the death of someone we love, God has also planted deep within us a hope and a desire for life beyond this life. Saint Paul knew this very well. One of his most striking and in a sense challenging phrases relates to this. "*If our hope in Christ has been for this life only,*" he writes, "*we are the most unfortunate of all people*" (1 Cor 15:19).

In his famous prayer, the bishop Saint Augustine helps us to understand why this is so. "*You have made us for yourself O God,*" he prays, "*and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*". One of my favourite spiritual writers, an English Benedictine nun who died some years ago, puts it this way: "*God creates in human hearts a huge desire and a sense of need, because he wants to fill them with the gift of himself*".



These are fundamental aspects of our Christian faith and our Catholic tradition. Unless we take them into our minds and into our hearts it is inevitable that reflection on our ultimate destiny, if we have the courage to engage with it, may well lead to fear rather than to hope.

Reflection on the four last things, it seems to me, needs to find its home within this understanding of God's passionate love for us and God's profound desire to draw us to himself. God wants us to live life to the full; God wants us to grow into generous, loving, compassionate and courageous people; God wants us to know of his love, and rejoice in his love, and live our lives in the freedom and hope which spring from this love. This is the beauty of the gift of Christian faith.

It is in this context I believe that we can understand this morning's gospel. The talents of which the gospel speaks are not skills or human qualities, but rather money. And in fact, the five talents and the two talents and even the one talent represent an enormous amount of money. The servants are being entrusted with a fortune, with a treasure. And because this is a parable we can understand those talents as representing the gift of life itself which God gives to every human being. In this sense, when the Master returns, when we meet God on the other side of death, we will, in the context of his generous love for us, be faced with the question: *what have I done with this extraordinary gift of life the Lord has given me? Have I received it with gratitude, embraced it with enthusiasm, and lived it with fidelity, generosity and compassion, conscious that in giving me the gift of life God has entrusted me with the task of living it as he, the giver, intended that it be lived?*

The whole Gospel tradition, as we have received it within the community of our Church, seeks to point us towards the Kingdom of God by helping us understand just what living life as God intends that it be lived actually means. The community of faith, our community of faith, notwithstanding its fragility, its sometimes scandalous lack of fidelity, its timidity in the face of opposition, and its very human limitations, remains, perhaps to our surprise, God's chosen instrument for keeping the memory, and the presence, and the challenge and the invitation of Jesus alive in our world.

This is what it means to be the community of disciples of Jesus; this is what it means to be a people walking in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd. May God give us the grace to rise to the challenge and play our part in being the living sign of the presence of Jesus among his people and in his world.