

Second Sunday before Advent; a liturgy for worship at home

Introduction

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel today we hear Jesus' parable of the talents, with those words of warning, 'Those who have will be given more, but for those who have not, even what they have will be taken away.' It is not about the wealth of riches, but the riches of the Gospel. These are precious gifts but we can too easily take them for granted, or fail to live by them. As Christians we have to be responsible stewards of all that God has given us.

Act of Penitence

We have often used God 's gifts too easily, as if they had been given to us for ourselves alone rather than for us to serve God and the Church. We ask the Lord to forgive us.

Lord Jesus, when you came among us you wanted to set us free from all fear:
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you have entrusted to us the future of the Church and of your kingdom among us:
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you have made us free and responsible in the service of God and the world:
Lord, have mercy.

Have mercy on us, Lord, forgive us for the times we have misused your gifts. Make us servants with you and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Act of Praise

The Gloria as follows, or some other hymn of praise

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation: stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess and revive in us new hope that all creation will one day be healed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's readings

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah

(1: 7 & 12 – 18)

Be silent before the Lord GOD!

For the day of the LORD is at hand; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts,

“The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm.”

Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste.

Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them;

though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast;

the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there.

That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish,

a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom,

a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind;

because they have sinned against the LORD, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them

on the day of the LORD's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall

be consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 90: 1 – 8 & 12

Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or the earth and the world were formed, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust and say: 'Turn back, O children of earth.'

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday, which passes like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away like a dream; they fade away suddenly like the grass.

In the morning it is green and flourishes; in the evening it is dried up and withered.

For we consume away in your displeasure; we are afraid at your wrathful indignation.

You have set our misdeeds before you and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians (5: 1 – 11)

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "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! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get

drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Acclamation to greet the Gospel:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Make your home in me, as I make mine in you, says the Lord.

Whoever remains in me bears fruit in plenty.

Alleluia!

(John 15: 4 – 5)

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew (25: 14 – 30)

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘The kingdom of heaven is as if a man going on a journey, summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

After a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have been

trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”

But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy servant! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest.

So, take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten talents. For all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless servant, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

Did you ever play that little game with your fingers: ‘There’s the church, there’s the steeple; open the doors, and there’s all the people?’ (or maybe, ‘where’s all the people?’)

Of course, the Church *is the people*. The building called a church is simply the box that contains them, the place they go to worship together. But you, we, are the actual meaning and reality called church, the family, the community of God, and we are just one ‘branch’ of a vast worldwide movement. Our relationship with God is never a private affair. Even though our personal time with God on a regular basis is important, it is always part of being church, being community, being members together of a movement that Jesus called into being. The Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, means just that, people called together.

As members of the church we are all its ministers. We all have a job to do, whether in the building or worship itself or in the community, and that includes the prayer on our own or in groups. The licenced clergy and lay ministers which for convenience we may often call the ministry team, are in

fact just *some* of the ministers - important yes, with particular roles and responsibilities, but not the only ministers. For the church is an every-member ministry, and 'a priesthood of all believers.'

So in the church every member has a job to do for God. It may not be a very big one, but it is important because it enables the church to function effectively or better than it otherwise would. God gives each one of us a unique set of power tools, according to our abilities, to use in doing God's work.

Jesus called the gifts which God gives us 'talents.' In his day, a talent meant a sum of money. In fact, it was around 35 kilos of silver – about 20 years' worth of wages for a working man. In the parable that Jesus tells in our Gospel reading today, the boss gave undreamt of wealth to his servants, as we read: 'To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one...' Two used the money to create more wealth for the boss. But one simply buried his lump of silver, and didn't use it at all. His employer was furious with him on his return and had him thrown into outer darkness, the place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

A preacher quoted this verse in a sermon once, and asked a man in the front row whether he was worried about it. The man replied, 'No, on account that I ain't got no teeth to gnash.' To which the preacher responded, 'For those who lack them, teeth will be provided.'

So memorable was this story, this parable, that the word 'talent' has changed its meaning. It now means an ability or skill. In fact, Jesus is using the talent as a metaphor for the gifts God has given us. And everything has been given to us for a purpose – not to be buried in the ground, that is, left unused, but set to work for God.

The parable begins by stressing that what was given to the employees was in proportion to their abilities. They made a profit in proportion to what they had invested, except the man with the one talent who chose to invest nothing. All that we are and all that we have comes from God, and God has lent each one of us as much as we need in order to help make the world a better place. All our time, talents and money come from God, so we must give back to God in proportion to what we have received. God has given you 168 hours each week. How big a proportion are you going to give back to God. If it is just one hour on a Sunday, it works out at about 0.6 per cent. What about 10, 20, 40 or

more minutes every day just given to God in prayer, spiritual reading, meditation, or some other activity that is simply for God, and demonstrates that God is being invested in. Of course, more pastoral tasks like visiting someone who is ill or lonely, listening to someone who is feeling sad, or helping someone in some other kind of need, can be worthwhile work for God. Many practical things are too, not least the jobs there are to do in church and in the preparation and delivery of worship, which have increased with the onslaught of this pandemic, putting more responsibility on fewer people.

The present crisis has also had an effect on our financial health as a church. We can only exist in this part of the world, or for that matter in any part of the world, thanks to the contributions everyone makes in the collection plate and through giving money in other ways. We have no tourists or winter visitors to help us out right now. We are fortunate to have our charity shop, but it is there specifically to support our outreach, our charitable causes, not to bear the burden of keeping the church and its ministry running. I hope that everyone will use this time to assess their giving in accordance with their means, and budget responsibly, and set aside money each week for the work of the church, including covering the weeks that you are not able to be here.

We are lucky to have Gwen as our Church treasurer, and not just our church for she is treasurer also to our Archdeaconry, which covers all the Anglican churches in Spain, Portugal and Morocco, each of whom are in some difficulty at this time, and some were even before the pandemic struck. One had to close because it could not sustain even a part time priest, who supported himself by working in a bar for most of the week. Gwen has often said that if every member of the churches would increase their giving even by the cost of a cup of coffee, many of the financial burdens would be lifted. Hopefully among that number some would be able to match the cost of a meal out on a weekly basis. It shouldn't be difficult. But the importance is not the amount but the consistency, the regular giving, preferably week by week. This is the only way we and all the other churches can be sustainable.

We don't simply 'go to church.' We *are* the church. The church according to one significant definition, is a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of justice, love and peace which Jesus came to inaugurate on earth. So we are church ideally or with the intention to show the rest of the world how to live according to God's design, to live in solidarity with one another on this planet, and with the creation itself.

Jesus' parable of the talents became the basis of Christian teaching about stewardship, hence our focus on it today. Our time, talents and money, indeed our life itself, are a loan from God. We must use them to serve God, and other people for his sake, as well as to provide a home, a place for us as God's people to meet, to worship and to draw strength from God and from one another as part of the Christian community that Jesus has called us to be, and so that we can live and work to God's praise and glory, and help to grow the kingdom of God in the world.

The Profession of Faith

We believe in God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us come now before God, our hope and Salvation bringing to Him our hopes, cares and concerns for His world and people.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

Father God, we pray that we, your Church will be found ready at your coming and always be faithful stewards of that which you have entrusted to us. May we always heed your call and do your will. We pray for our Bishops Robert and David, Archdeacon David and our area Dean Canon Medhat as they lead Our Diocese in Europe We give thanks for our churches of St. Francis and all who serve you here. May we all show forth your light and love through Christ our Lord.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

Father we pray for the mission of the church as it seeks to reveal your Kingdom and your great love for us. Help us to encourage and build up one another. We thank you for the talents you have given us, help us to recognise them in each other and may they be always used for the benefit of others and for your Glory. We pray for those whose talents have been underused through no fault of their own; the poor, needy and those living under oppression. We pray for all evangelists, missionaries and preachers of your precious Word. We pray a

blessing on every family represented here today and those too who have been unable to join us.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

Father, we bring before you the governments of the world; for nations at war and in dispute. Empower and protect those with the negotiation skills to find ways that bring justice and peace.

We raise before you the governments of Britain, Spain and the USA. Give Godly wisdom to all in power and whose decisions affect us all.

May your justice come to pass for all regardless of creed, colour or place in life. We pray for countries who are suffering from natural disasters especially the Philippines.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

We remember those who find it difficult to find joy in their lives because of illness, disability, pain or depression. We pray that they will find fulfilment, peace and healing in you. We pray for the sick in our church family and others known only to you.

We lift to you the carers of the world, those in the medical profession and the friends and families who gladly give their lives in the service of others. We especially give thanks to those on the front line of emergency services and the fight against Covid 19.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

Father, when our hearts are aching, you hear our cry. We pray for all friends and families who have recently lost loved ones and for those whose pain and loss continues. We come before you trusting in your great mercy and pray that you will receive into your kingdom those who have passed from this life.

Lord in your mercy.....Hear our prayer

May we go from this place, knowing ourselves to be loved and willing to share your love with others.

Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour Jesus Christ.

As children of light and of the day we pray to God our Father the prayer of Jesus:

Our Father.....

You may wish to offer this or an alternative prayer of spiritual communion, and/or in silence just sit in the peace of the ever-present Lord for a while.

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.
May your body and blood be my food and drink.
May your passion and death be my strength and life.
Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.
May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.
Let me not run from the love which you offer
but hold me safe from the forces of evil.
On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.
Keep calling to me until that day comes
when, with your saints, I may praise you for ever. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Lord our God, source of all that is good, through the gift of your Son Jesus Christ you have made us capable of sowing the seeds of your life and love. When you ask for an account of what we have done with our lives, may we hear from you that we have been good and faithful servants who did much with the little we had, and that we may enter your lasting joy. We ask this through Jesus Christ, the Lord who has shown us the way to you. Amen.

Blessing

Our life with all that we are and have is not ours to possess, for it is a trust from God, a 'loan' from God, not to be kept safely in a 'hole in the ground' but to work with as best we can, each according to our own ability.
May almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless us and keep us safe, and give us the courage to serve him and the people around us with all that is in us. Amen.

Let us go in the peace of Christ and be his good and faithful servants. Thanks be to God.