Rev. Toan Do
Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Matthew 25:14-30

THIRTY-THID SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Epiphany Catholic Church
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I was ordained in the early part of 2004. It's been over 22 years now. And I don't remember exactly when, but I joined the Archdiocese of Louisville as a seminarian back in late 1993 and early 1994. But I believe that it was toward the middle of Archbishop Kelly's tenure here as the archbishop that the archdiocese began to look more into what we call just fair wages, not only for priests, ordained priests, but also for lay people who work for the church. And because of that, salaries and salary scale became part of the payroll throughout the archdiocese, priests included. But by church law, going back hundreds and hundreds of years, the bishop, the local bishop is responsible for the livelihood and the lives, good and bad, of his priests. If you can take that and put in your imagination, I believe religious women and men would understand that more as the superior or the provincial than most of us who are lay people.

That said, the reason I mention this is because when I joined the archdiocese as a priest, I was put on the payroll. Although the parish paid for my salary and my pastoral ministry and so on, but it's through the archdiocese policies and scale and the bishop has the final say to it. And part of this system for ordained priests is that we were able to put in, I believe, don't quote me because I haven't looked at it for years now. I believe that 4% was taken out of our salary and the parish would match up to 4% and put that monthly into our savings or stock market. And as you know, the point of this, I believe, of this new development in the late 1980s or early 1990s is so that for the priests, once they are retired, they should not rely totally on the archbishop. By law, when I'm dead or crippled, I could go to his door and ask him, demand him to feed me.

But I believe the system helps in a sense. And after a few years and years of working, that money grew. The stock market grows, goes up and down depending on each year and political season and so on. Unfortunately, like one of the bad servants, when Covid hit, after so many years of putting that money in the stock market, I put it in the wrong company. Covid hit. That company went out of

business. I lost everything. And I'm sure I'm not the only one. But the point is, if you want to read this gospel today, this long gospel, from the perspective of the church even condoning with what we call today modern 21st century capitalism, you can surely read it because the first servant and the second servant, they received each five talents and then two talents. And in the biblical time, each talent counts, or is equivalent to, at least 15 years of one's full-time wages and working.

So, if five talents multiplied by that, then you see it's almost one's lifetime of working. And that first servant traded and made five times more. The second similarly in a lesser scale, think about those who want to use the gospel message today for what we call building capitalism, growing. You can certainly do that. But in fact, if we once take that, fix that, mindset on capitalism to grow and to become rich in materials, I believe we or that person has missed the point. Because when Jesus uses this parable, let me put it in perspective. Today is the last parable in the gospel of Matthew. We have listened to a number of parables throughout this summer, the ordinary time. And today is the second to the last weekend of the whole cycle, liturgical year. Next weekend, we celebrate Christ the King to be the last. And then after that, you recall and will remember, we'll go into Advent season to begin a new liturgical year of year B. So, coming to the end of this liturgical season of cycle A, we are coming also toward the end of Matthew's gospel. And it is chapter 25. And chapter 24 and 25 put the audience and the readers in the context of what Matthew tried to tell us, namely the eschatological end time. Namely, for early Christians, after Jesus died, was raised from the dead, was among his disciples as a resurrected person for a short time, 40 days, he was taken up to heaven. What happened, early Christians asked. Even Paul in the second reading today from his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is known in this letter to have misunderstood what Jesus meant by the eschatology, which is what it means to be the end of time.

When the kingdom of God, the real kingdom of God, will come is when the Son of God, the risen Christ, will return with the triumph of God to intervene into humanity's course of life. Of course, early Christians were wondering about these questions. And today's gospel, together with Paul's second reading from his first letter to the Thessalonians, give us a glimpse into what Jesus meant by the eschatology, the end of time within which or toward which we are walking our faith journey. If we can take that and put in perspective then what Jesus presents to his disciples in the parable today almost sounds, or allows us to, convince us that Jesus himself condoned our 21st century understanding of capitalism or growing rich, then we missed his point. I believe, in this gospel, we have to look at the end

of time in which or within that timeframe we are all given our talents, each according to his or her capacity.

And the talents here have very little to do with the material that we think we want to do. In fact, the talents here are the resilience, the wisdom and the energy and the creativeness to use God's gift of time to us, whether it is one talent, 15 years; two talents, 30 years; or five talents, 75 years of our working time to use it energetically, to use it creatively, to build up God's kingdom here while we are on earth. Not to build the capitals, not to grow rich in materials, but to grow faithfully and spiritually connected to God the living one.

As we see, the first reading today from the Book of Proverbs, the author compares a man who has a wife, a wife of virtue, is like a pearl that the husband treasures and holds onto all his life. Paul tells the Thessalonians, concerning times and seasons, we have no need for anything for us to worry about. Why? Because to the Thessalonian Christian, the fact and the truth that they were converted to the resurrection of Jesus, and this very resurrection of Jesus, done and brought about by God, is all that they need, whether it is one talent to use it in our own term, one year of living, two talents or five talents. It is God's gift of life that is within us that how we treasure that gift of life and reach out to those who are in need is what matters. So, the focus of the parable lies upon the behavior of the servants. They are not, as we know and understand, they are not expected to produce the same amount of profit. The master, let's use Jesus and, more so, let’s use the image of God, recognizes our strengths and our weaknesses. What we each are asked is what God expects, that each of us work energetically and creatively using the gifts of life, the gift that God has given us for our own sake.

The essential point is, as we see for example, the third servant paralyzed in fear of the demanding master and also in the master's point of view knowing the servant is lazy, the point is that the servant performed just one unproductive act regarding the talent, the gift of life entrusted to him.