

THE THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – A

The gospel reading is the parable of the talents. Christians are servants expected by Jesus, their master, to make full use of any gifts he has given them so that his kingdom may grow on earth; they must give an account of their stewardship. The parable illustrates these points. The first reading is from a poem about the perfect wife. The second reading teaches that as 'children of light' and should live our lives prepared for 'the Day of the Lord.'

The **First Reading** is from the book of Proverbs. The wisdom literature in the Bible comes after the historical books and comprises the books of Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Wisdom literature flourished throughout the ancient East, it treats of the meaning of life and offers a recipe for successful living. Wisdom literature in Israel came from the same soil and was absorbed in the individual and his destiny but was viewed in the clearer light of the religion of Yahweh. Real wisdom is found in the fear of God since God alone is wise. Wisdom is an outpouring of the glory of the Almighty, an image of his perfection. Wisdom is sure to bring happiness and folly, ruin. This is the doctrine on which the teaching of Wisdom is based. All this teaching was preparing for the revelation of Wisdom incarnate as Matthew says: "here is someone greater than Solomon."

The book of Proverbs is the most representative work of Israelite wisdom literature. The main part of the book is divided in two parts: 1. 'The Proverbs of Solomon' ch.10-22.16; (a selection from the Sages 22.17-24); 2. 'Some more of Solomon's proverbs' ch.25-29 to which appendices have been added. There is a prologue ch.1-9 and an epilogue ch.31.10-31 in praise of the ideal wife. King Solomon, who succeeded King David, was always thought to be the greatest sage of Israel, and according to 1 Kg.5.12, is thought to be the author of some three thousand proverbs. It is impossible to attribute any of these proverbs to Solomon but the collection as a whole does date from Solomon's time. As a whole the book represents several centuries of thought on the part of the sages and with post-exilic additions the whole book was probably given its definitive form in the fifth century. The teaching of this book has been transcended by that of Christ.

The reading, 31.10-13,19-20,30-31, is an alphabetical poem in praise of the perfect wife and forms the epilogue to the book. The poem is fairly self-explanatory. The second part of verse 30 'the woman who fears the Lord is the one to praise' has been amplified to read 'A wise woman will be praised – the fear of the Lord, this is what must be extolled,' a fitting conclusion to this wisdom book.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 127.1-5, reflects on the sum of wisdom, 'the fear of the Lord' and 'the perfect wife' from the first reading. The psalm celebrates happiness in the home of the upright, those who 'walk in his ways.' Fear of the Lord is the source and sum of wisdom and this wisdom will give you prosperity, a loving wife in the heart of your home and the blessing of children. The man who fears the Lord will be blessed all the days of his life.

The **Second Reading** comes from the first letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians. Paul founded the Church in Thessalonica on his 2nd missionary journey in the summer of the year 50. He wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians in the winter of 50/51, some of his earliest writing. In the opening chapters Paul writes very affectionately to his converts now undergoing persecution. In the latter part of the letter he gives some practical suggestions including answers to questions about what happens to people when they die and about Christ's Second Coming (the Parousia). This letter along with the second one are important because they give us Paul's teaching about the end of time and also give us Paul's thinking at this time which was, how did Christ's Resurrection from the dead and his Second Coming bring salvation to his converts whether alive or dead?

The reading, 5.1-6, is about watchfulness while waiting for the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonians that he knows that they 'are well aware....that the Day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night....as suddenly as labour pains come on a pregnant woman.' So they must not 'live in the dark' and be caught unawares. 'No, you are all children of light and children of the day.' Paul contrasts 'light' and 'day' with 'dark' and 'night' in other words 'wakefulness' with 'sleep.' The Thessalonians are encouraged to be children of light, awake and ready for the Lord when he comes. Read down to verse 11 if you have time.