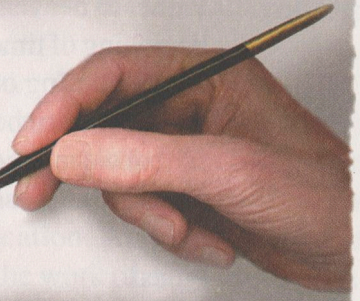


making a life



THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE A

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

GATHERING

(An unlit candle rests on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place. As members gather, they place items they have brought with them that are or have been associated with their daily work on the table.)

We entertain this week both the industriousness of the *worthy wife* and the fate of the *wicked, lazy servant*. Last week, we reflected on the wisdom of that which awaits us in daily life if we but seek to be attentive to God's presence. In what ways have you been more present and attentive to self, others and God this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader for this session invites members to a time of silent recognition of the presence of God. After a time of quiet, the leader invites members to say a word or two about the item they have brought with them to the session and how it is/has been associated with their work. When all have had the opportunity to speak, members join in singing, "Stewards of Earth". The song may be found on the Internet.)

Leader: Father in heaven, ever-living source of all that is good, from the beginning of time you promised humankind salvation through the future coming of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to drink of his truth and expand our hearts with the joy of his promises, so that we may serve you in faith and in love and know forever the joy of your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Adapted from Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time:
Alternative Opening Prayer, **The Sacramentary**.

Focus Question

How hard a worker are you?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

What rich imagery we have this week in the reading from Proverbs! There is a lot going on in the life of the “worthy wife”. But this woman of substance is not merely busy, she is industrious. There is accomplishment here. She is *making a life*, a life in relationship to her family and to those beyond her family in need. What gives it all its final meaning, we learn, is the fact that she is a “woman who fears the Lord”.

Fearing God does not mean being terrified of God, it means living in profound respect for the mystery from which we spring. It means living in awe of the God who is above us, below us, around us and deep within us. It means knowing that we are not first our own, we are God’s own.

There is something of a theology and spirituality of work in this reading. Her work is not dull, tedious or boring for this woman of substance because it has

meaning. She is not merely taken up with the tasks of the workaday world; she is about her *life's work*.

Make something of yourself, we say to young people. Work and identity do have an important connection to one another. Our most important life project is to realize ourselves as *capax dei*, capable of God. God calls us to be partners in creation, redemption and sanctification. And we realize this partnership, as did the woman of substance, in the work of daily life.

However much it might seem like it to the contemporary capitalist mind, Jesus' parable about the man going on a journey is not about the maximization of profits. But it is about industriousness, industriousness rooted in purposefulness. For a people of faith, the purposeful life means loving tenderly, living justly and walking humbly with our God.

God gives "to each according to his ability". In telling his parable, Jesus challenges his disciples – us – to take our call to partnership with God seriously. Consider the fate of the "wicked, lazy servant". It makes a difference to our God that we make a difference with our lives and resources. Embrace your circumstances, whatever they may be, Jesus tells us. Take risks. Do something with your life for the sake of the reign of God.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week's readings speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or our world today?
- ◆ What does work mean to you?
- ◆ If you have ever been unwillingly unemployed for any length of time, what has been the impact of that experience on you?
- ◆ How much "fear of the Lord" is there in your life?
- ◆ Name some accomplishment that has helped to define your life. What does it say to you, to others, about who you are?
- ◆ What tasks of daily life have particular meaning for you?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Be in touch with the present tasks of your daily labor. Acknowledge these accomplishments. Hand them over to God.
- ◆ Identify that long put-off or half-finished task around the house that, when accomplished, will make life easier for you/your household. Dig in. Do it. Stay with it. Finish it.
- ◆ Seek out the documentary film, **Supersize Me**. View the film with family members or friends. Afterward, take stock of how you all may be caught up in over-consumption.

CLOSING PRAYER AND SENDING FORTH

(The leader calls for a few minutes of silent prayer. A selection of instrumental of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader prays the psalm that follows. After each stanza of the psalm, members respond, “Blessed are those who fear the Lord.”)

Leader: Blessed are those who fear the LORD,
who walk in his ways!
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
blessed shall you be, and favored.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.
The LORD blesses you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

Psalm 128-2-6

(The session concludes with the praying of the Lord’s Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace.)