

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time: Developing His Talents

I saw a great cartoon in a magazine recently. It showed a prophet of the end of the world on a New York Street Corner holding up a sign: The end is near. Underneath the bold letters are: <http://www.endisnear.com>, find us on facebook and X that used to be known as twitter. The end of the world may not be near, but social media may have us all wishing it was upon us.

Every few years someone makes a dire prediction the world is coming to an end on a specific date. Each prediction is vehement, expressed with certainty, and wrong. Last January a teen confronted me with, "Christ is supposed to come again this year. What do you think about that?" I responded, "I think I'd better look busy." Jesus makes it quite clear in Matthew 24:36: "No one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the father." The Father, the Creator, is the only one who knows when his creation will come to a conclusion.

But that does not mean that we should not be prepared for the end. In today's second reading, St. Paul tells the people of Thessalonika that the day of the Lord, the end of time, will come like a thief in the night when people least expect. Some of these people took Paul so seriously that they quit working and caring for their families. They expected everyone else to take care of them as they braced themselves for the end. Paul had to write a second letter to Thessalonika and tell the people there that those who refused to work, should not eat.

Perhaps time will not end before we die, but when we die our own personal time comes to an end. We spend the month of November praying for our loved ones and all the souls of the faithful departed who have died. Death is a reality everyone has to face.

How then, should we prepare for the Lord to come whether it is at the end of all time or the end of our own personal time? Instructions are available throughout the Bible, but particularly in today's Gospel, which comes in the section of the *Gospel of Matthew* where Jesus is speaking about the end of time. Today's Gospel is the Parable of the Talents. The master entrusts his possessions to three of his servants, and then goes on a journey. When he returns he calls them to see how they invested them, rewarding the first two who had returned more to him than he had given them, and punishing the third who buried the talent in the ground. A little something on this. By burying the talent, the ancient law said that the servant was no longer responsible for it. That is why the Master in the parable was so upset with the third servant.

To the ancients, a talent was a unit of weight. The weight was determined by the amount of water needed to fill a vessel called an amphora. Since the various ancient people had different sizes of amphoras, a talent for the ancient Greeks was 57 pounds, for the Romans 71 pounds, and for the Egyptians 60 pounds. So a talent would most likely be between 57 to 71 pounds probably of silver. But I think we can

use our definition of talent to best explain how we need to prepare for the Lord to come into our lives. Our definition of talent is the natural aptitude or skill someone has. Some have musical talent. Some are talented technicians. Some are talented athletes, and so forth. We all have natural gifts. We were given these talents by God. We are expected to develop them to serve God and his people.

Quite often an athlete will begin an interview after a sporting event in which he or she excelled with, "First of all, I give all glory to God." The athlete is right. God is the source of all our talent. The athlete sees his or her developing this talent as returning the gift to God. To the athlete the focus should be on God, not him or her. We all need to do this regarding the many talents the Lord has entrusted to each of us. Perhaps someone has said to you, "You are such a good mother, such a good father." Or perhaps someone has said to us, "I'm no where near as good at this as you are." Our response, at least to ourselves should be, "Whatever I do well, I credit God as the source of the talent. All Glory belongs to Him."

There is a wonderful story about Ludwig van Beethoven in this regard. The famous composer was well aware that he had few social skills. He found talking to people not just burdensome, but beyond his abilities. He just couldn't do it, even if he had to speak to someone. The story is that one day he heard that a dear friend of his had suddenly lost his son. Beethoven rushed over to his friend's house, but he just couldn't find the words to comfort the dead boy's father. So he used the gifts he had been given. Beethoven went to the piano and for a full thirty minutes he played a beautiful elegy. It is believed that he composed it on the spot. He used his talent to console the grieving.

A man once held a bulletin article I had written in my face. Actually, it was about two inches from my nose, and considering that I am Italian, probably not that close to my face after all. Anyway, he complained, "Why can't your homilies be as good as your articles?" I replied that the articles were homilies I had given in past years that I rewrote for the bulletin. What I should have said is that "God gave me a greater talent in writing than in speaking," thus putting the focus on God instead of on myself. All our talents, all our gifts flow from God. None of us have the right to take credit for them. We emphasize this at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest holds up the Body and Blood of Christ and says, "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, O God Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, for ever and ever." And we all say, "Amen," God is the source of all talent. All glory is His.

"But," a person might object, "God gave me talent, but I have to work hard to develop the talent." A state champion swimmer has to get up early to put in an hour or more in the pool before school starts, then hit the weight room and go to swim practice for two or more hours. A doctor who so many claim is the finest ever, has had to work hard to get through Medical School and Residency and now spends as much time as possible developing his or her knowledge to serve his or her patients better. Everyone can point out how hard he or she works to develop his or her talents. But our talents came from God and must be developed to serve God. He is the focus, not us. His is

the glory, not ours. We share in His Glory only to the extent that we have allowed Him to be seen in our efforts. Nothing that we do should be about us. All our gifts should be seen as just that, gifts from God. This is a message we need to convey to our children and Teens.

The Lord tells us in the parable that the Master will come for an accounting of how we used the particular talents He has given each of us. The first two servants in the parable returned more than they received, allowing the Master's possessions to grow. God is calling us to develop what we are given to allow His Kingdom to grow.

I often look at you folks and I am in awe of your God-given talents. So many people feel that the world is going "to hell and a handbag." I cannot look at you and feel that way. In fact, I am very positive about the world's future because I see how you are developing God's gifts every day. Indeed I am elated that many of our families are filling the world with lots of children. I am elated that our young people are less concerned with paying for children than with bringing new reflections of God's love into the world. The world needs more people like you.

So, will the world end soon? Maybe yes, maybe no. We cannot be concerned with worrying about the exact day or hour. What we have to be concerned with is doing our part to prepare for the Lord's coming, either at the end of all time or the end of our personal time. If we develop the talents he has entrusted to us, the day will come when the Father will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants."