

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Preparation and Commitment**      Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time/A      November  
19, 2017      10:00 AM      Prv 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31;      1 Thes 5:1-6;      **Mt 25:14-30**  
(Every human being has gifts. We have to use them in the service of God in this life.)

This past year we have been reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mathew. Next week we will have completed the whole thing. Together with last week, and this week, and next week that's one chapter, and the topic of the chapter is **what life is really all about**. It contains **three parables: The Wise and Foolish Virgins, The Talents, and The Sheep and the Goats**. And there are three lessons about what we really need to think about in terms of how we live our lives, because they are all suggesting that **life on earth is actually a sifting process**, whereby those willing to become partners with God are being separated from the dross of people who could care less about God or any purpose outside themselves. But becoming God's partner will not happen if we are **unprepared like the foolish virgins** who brought nothing to the task, or if we are **uncommitted like this useless servant** in today's gospel. **Preparation and commitment are absolutely essential to be a partner with God** in this great work of bringing about a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation.

Now Jesus always showed deep compassion and concern for the poor. In today's parable it may seem a little bit odd the harsh judgment issued against this admittedly pitiful person. But **Jesus was not only interested in helping to provide the physical needs of the poor. He was also interested in building up their sense of who they are**. And it is true that often **we all can devalue our own selves**. We do that to ourselves. We undermine our own value in our own eyes. **We compare ourselves to others**. We think other people are luckier or more fortunate or more blessed. **Well it is true that talents and abilities are unevenly distributed in the human populace**—that's true. That's not a false observation. However it is also true that **from those who have more, more will be demanded**. That is the fundamental logic of Scripture, even reaching

back into the Old Testament. From those to whom more has been given, more will be required. So there is a certain sort of equity built into life in this way. And **wishing for better circumstances is actually in a way very foolish because you don't know what that will entail**, what greater responsibilities then will be on your shoulders. And this is mentioned many times throughout the gospels. So in this way there is a balance in life, and those who believe in God should be able to discern it to some degree.

The first two servants in today's parable responded faithfully, offering to their master a proportional return on their master's trust. The third, however, didn't believe in himself, and wouldn't risk or commit himself to anything. And this was a great sadness to the master in the story. Every human being is an image of God. **Every human being has gifts**, although we personally might not see them, they are there. **We have to discern them.** We have to find them. We have to utilize them. **We have to use them in the service of God in this life.** And so this is the work that is laid before us **to treasure and to share whatever it is God has given us.** And the lesson has to be learned most especially by those who have the least. **Burying our gifts out of fear of failure is to defeat ourselves before we even start.**