Lectio Divina – 33rd Sunday of the Year A

Matthew's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Author is anonymous, but named as 'Matthew the tax collector' by later tradition.
- Written in scholarly 'synagogue' Greek.
- Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
- Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: "When Jesus had finished….":
    1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
    2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
    3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
    4. 3rd: 13 Parable Discourse
    5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
    6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
- May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
- Jesus first words are 'to fulfil all righteousness'.
- A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
- 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
- The only Gospel to explicitly mention the 'Church' – Matthew is theologian of the church.
- Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
- Names Jesus as 'Messiah' at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 25:14-30 - things to notice

- This Sunday's Gospel follows immediately from last Sunday's.
- Remember that we are in the Apocalyptic Judgement discourse, so there are undercurrents of urgency and vague dire consequences in these readings. We are also approaching the end of the Liturgical Year (in a fortnight), so the readings at this end-time of the year have an end-time character.
- Themes of being prepared, keeping watch, staying awake, being ready and vigilant dominate the parables in Chapters 24 & 25 before the passion narrative begins in Chapter 26.
- The common theme of the Christian scriptures is: how do we live in the 'in-between times' – the time between the first coming of Jesus and his final coming?
- That seems to be the question being address in this section of Matthew's Gospel.
- Mark, Matthew and Luke use 'twinning' stories in their Gospels – what happens to men also happens to women; what happens to high-born people also happens to poor people; what happens to the righteous also happens to the sinners; what happens to old people also happens to young people. This is often seen in the miracle stories and in the parables. Last week: wise and foolish women, this week: wise and foolish men.
- Not an allegory but a parable – so don't push it too far! Look for the point of the story rather than associating all the actors with different types of people, and the wealthy man with God.
- A talent is a very large sum on money, maybe as much as 15 years of wages in the ancient world – it is not an aptitude, capacity or gift.
- The amount of money given to each of the servants is 'in proportion to his ability'.
- It is an act of great faith and trust in the servants by the wealthy man.
- Notice the difference between the first two servants, who trade with the money and make more money, and the third who simply buries the money in the ground (does nothing with it).
- The wealthy man returns a long time after. The phrasing suggests that this is an important element of the story. Why?
- In the reckoning the first two servants are praised for doubling their master's money.
- The phrase "you have shown you can be faithful in small things," is curious given the large sums of money involved.

- Now these two servants will be entrusted with even greater and are invited to join in their master's happiness – that is, share my life.
- Finally, the servant with the one talent justifies his lack of enterprise saying he has lived in fear of the wealthy man whom he has heard is a hard man, reaping what he has not sown and gathered where he has not scattered. So he did nothing with the talent, ignoring the great rust the master had placed in him.
- In Matthew's Gospel fear is the opposite of faith.
- Fear has completely limited the servant's productivity.
- The servant is called wicked and lazy. At the very least he should have deposited the money with the bankers so that the master would earn interest.
- The one talent is taken from the servant and he is dismissed from the household and thrown 'out into the dark where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth'.

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

The first reading is the Ode to a Perfect Wife from the book of Proverbs which portrays the wife as trustworthy and industrious, open-handed to the poor and the needy. Praise her for her wisdom and give her a share of what her hands have worked for. (Notice how the faithful servants in the parable get a share of the life they have made through their productivity).

Reflection

Continuing the theme of last week's parable about the wise and the foolish women, this parable also concentrates on wisdom. The wise servants fulfil the bond of trust placed in them by the master by are being productive with an enormous amount of money entrusted to them. Like the perfect wife in the first reading, they are industrious in contrast to the third servant who uses fear as an excuse for doing nothing.

Like last Sunday, today's Gospel is another 'meantime' parable - how do we live as disciples of Christ in the meantime as we wait for his return?

The master entrusts his property to his servants and goes away. On his return, he asks for an accounting of what they have done with his property. The servants who have been industrious and productive are praised.

Christ has entrusted us with the Kingdom of God. We are called to work industriously and productively with the Spirit so that the Kingdom, the Reign of God's grace, may be seen and experienced through us, and that others also may come to believe. The Kingdom gifts of love, justice, mercy, compassion and forgiveness are multiplied. The Kingdom grows.

Both the first reading and the Gospel today praise busy, energetic people - those who produce much from what has been given to them. In these readings we find an image of how to wait in this 'in between time' for the final coming of Christ. The Christian disciple is called to watch and wait, not in a lazy or self-indulgent way, but eagerly doing the work of the Kingdom and producing its fruits of justice, mercy, peace, hope and love as we go about our daily tasks.

It is the ideal of responsible stewardship which is proclaimed in the Gospel. We have been entrusted with the very life of God. What are we doing/will we do with it?