

My Brothers and Sisters,

As I mentioned last week, at the end of each church year, we look forward with hope to Christ's coming in glory. In last Sunday's Gospel, what distinguished the wise from the foolish virgins was that the wise virgins were prepared for the coming of the bridegroom. In today's reading from First Thessalonians, St. Paul reminds us, "*For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night.*" Both of these challenge us to be prepared for Christ's coming in glory but also for our own death. One of the ways we prepare for the coming of Christ and for our own death is by realizing authentic Christian values in our lives and by helping others realize them in theirs.

Today's readings address a couple of ways we realize authentic Christian values in our lives and help others realize them in theirs.

I struggled to understand how today's reading from Proverbs connects with preparing for the coming of God's kingdom, clearly the theme in the other two readings. However, I am going to suggest a couple of ways.

The creation story in the first chapter of Genesis strongly suggests that the image and likeness of God is found, first of all, in human community, of which marriage is the prototype. Proverbs sings the praises of a worthy wife and her impact upon her husband and upon society. If we want to realize authentic moral values in our lives, we have to give priority to the relationships in our lives, especially our family relationships. However, the passage suggests that we also are called to make a difference in the world. As the author of Proverbs wrote, "*She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy.*"

When I do marriage preparation, I always make the point that the best test of love or friendship is that the couple or the friends consistently call forth the best in each other. In other words, authentic love or friendship or even charity calls forth good in others. The basis of authentic love or friendship or charity is respect. We can only call forth the best in others if we respect all persons no matter how different they are from us. We have to accept them for who and what they are. We have to accept them as God's beloved children just as we are.

Today's Gospel presents us with the parable of the talents. In Jesus' time, talents were units of money. However, I think we can apply this parable to gifts and talents as we understand them. God has given each of us different abilities and different talents. If we are going to realize authentic Christian values in our lives and help others realize them in theirs, we need both to develop our gifts and share them with others. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*" [I Cor. 12:7; NAB, 1970]. When we develop and share our gifts with others, we make a difference in the world and call forth the best in others.

My brothers and sisters, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul reminds us that we are not in darkness. Rather we "*are children of the light and children of the day.*" As children of the light, we are called to be leaders. The best way we can be leaders is by faithfully imitating Christ in our own lives and by proclaiming and living Gospel values. However, we are also called to bring light into the lives of others. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to be joyful, optimistic, and life giving.