

My Brothers and Sisters,

As we know, the liturgical year does not correspond with the calendar year. The liturgical year begins on the First Sunday of Advent and ends on the Solemnity of Christ, the King, which is next Sunday. Every year, as we approach the end of the liturgical year, the readings begin to focus on the end times and the return of Christ in glory and challenge us always to be prepared for we know not the day or the hour.

However, when Scripture calls us to be prepared, we need to understand that we are being called to be prepared not just for Christ's return in glory but also for his return for us at the end of our earthly lives. In John's Gospel, Jesus promised, "*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be*" [14:3]. This is the Gospel chosen most often for funerals at Little Flower.

The reading from Proverbs describes the qualities of a worthy wife. This reading is also often used at funerals. By living out her vocation as a worthy wife, reaching out her arms and hands to the poor and needy, she is preparing for the day of the Lord and her own death: "*Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates.*"

To understand today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, we need to understand that in the early Church, many believed that Christ's return in glory was imminent. Paul's answer was that "*the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,*" i.e., when we least expect it. However, he tells us not to worry because we are children of the light. The question of Christ's return is a perennial question in Christianity. Christians are always looking for signs that he is coming soon. However, during his life, Jesus gave the best answer: "*But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*" [Mk. 13:32].

The parable of the talents in today's Gospel challenges us. In the time of Jesus, talents were units of money. One talent represented a very large sum of money. However, we need to think of talents the way we use the word. First, the parable makes the point that our talents or gifts all come from God, and we are called to be good stewards of God's gifts.

When I was young, we were constantly warned by parents and teachers that God expected us to develop our talents and use them to the best of our ability. The implication, however, was that we needed to develop them for our own benefit, e.g., to get into a good school or to get a good paying job or to be successful in life. However, St. Paul suggests that the gifts God has given us are not only for our own benefit. St. 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]. Although our gifts are for our benefit, we are called to use them to build up the body of Christ. Although he focuses on spiritual gifts, we really need to look at all our gifts and talents and ask how they can contribute to the common good of the Church and society.

Second, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, "*The gift you have received, give as a gift*" [10:8; NAB, 1970]. The gifts and talents we have been given, the gifts and talents we have received, are intended to be shared with others.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel challenges us to be prepared for Christ's return by developing and using the gifts and talents God had given us not just for ourselves but to build up the Church and the community and by sharing the gifts and talents God has given us with others.