

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
St. Anthony of Padua Church, Effingham, Illinois
16 November 2008

The Thirty-third Sunday of the Year (A)

"A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them" (Matthew 25:14). Who is this man if not Jesus Christ, and who are these servants if not his disciples? But what is this journey on which he sets out, and why does he not take us with him? The journey on which he set out was his Ascension into heaven where he sits now at the right hand of the Father.

This journey of the Redeemer is one that he calls each of us to embark upon, following after him. He says, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be" (John 12:26). If we are faithful servants, "our future is 'to be with the Lord.'"¹ The Lord has not so much left us or forgotten us as he has prepared the way for us. He now beckons us to embark upon his journey with him, toward him.

Through the parable Jesus tells today, it is clear that we will attain heaven - that we will be with him - only if we use the talents he has entrusted to us wisely and well. We know that he has gone away, but we also know that "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" and that "of his kingdom there will be no end."

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Audience Address, 12 November 2008.

When will he come again? We do not know. What we do know is this: "the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night" (I Thessalonians 5:2). "Therefore," Saint Paul exhorts us, "let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober" (I Thessalonians 5:6). What is more, "God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep [whether we are living or dead] we may live together with him" (I Thessalonians 5:9-10).

Saint Paul also tells us that the day of the Lord will not catch us off guard because we are not in darkness. Rather, we are "children of the light and children of the day" (I Thessalonians 5:5). On the day of our Baptism we were entrusted with this light, with the light of Christ, "to be kept burning brightly" and to "keep the flame of faith alive" in our hearts.² If we have guarded the flame of faith and remained faithful then on the day when the Lord comes in his glory, we will "go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom."³ There will be no reason to fear.

We know that without Christ the future is dark and bleak, for Christ himself is the Light. We are not without Christ; we are not in darkness but in his light, because Christ is with us

² *Rite of Baptism for One Child*, 100.

³ *Ibid.*

and we are in him! "The Christian knows that the light of Christ is stronger [than the powers of darkness] and because of this, lives in the hope that is not vague, in a hope that gives certainty and courage to face the future."⁴ We wait, then, in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Waiting for the return of Christ "does not dispense with the work of this world, but on the contrary, brings responsibilities before the divine Judge regarding our way of acting in this world."⁵ It is precisely this recognition that we will have to render an account of our lives before Christ the Lord that gives life meaning, purpose and direction.

Pope Benedict famously said, "The one who has hope lives differently!"⁶ The meaning, purpose and direction of human life are all found in Jesus Christ. From him we learn that we are made by love and for love; from him, we receive the command to lead all people to him; and it is toward him that every aspect of our lives must be directed. This is what it means to live differently, to live only for Jesus Christ. Only in this way will we come to know the true and lasting joy and peace of the kingdom of heaven.

What does the Lord say to those servants who used wisely those talents he entrusted to them? "Well done, my good and

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Audience Address, 12 November 2008.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Spe salvi*, 2.

faithful servant... Come, share your master's joy" (Matthew 25:21). Christ the Lord told us that he came "so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete" (John 15:11). If we want to be filled with joy then we must live according to the way of Christ, using what he has given us freely and without concern for what it will cost. We must, as he says, give our life away in order that we might find it.

To those who did not use his talents well and wisely he says, "You wicked, lazy servant! Throw this useless servant into the darkness outside" (Matthew 25:26, 30). These are the ones who tried to keep their lives but have now lost them.

We see, then, that the manner in which we live our life does matter, and that heaven is not a guarantee for any of us. Are we then to fear the Second Coming of Christ? Are we to fear our own death? Not if we live for Christ and for others, not if we live as true servants of Jesus Christ.

One cannot wisely use the gifts Jesus entrusts selfishly; the good and faithful servant uses the talents given him with no thought for himself; he uses them out of a genuine love of God and of neighbor, without counting the cost.

No, we are not afraid of death or of the end of the world because we know that Christ Jesus is risen from the dead. We know that he is with the Father and that he is also with us always. Regardless of how powerful the forces of darkness may

be, "no one is stronger than Christ, because he is with the Father... Because of this, we are secure and free of fear."⁷ Death holds no more power over us; we, too, will rise again.

The Christian remains confident in Jesus Christ, and "with this certainty, with this freedom, with this joy, we live."⁸ This is the blessed assurance of faith. What is this talent, this gift that the Lord entrusts to his servants, if not the gift of faith?

How, then, do we make a return on this faith? We see that the good and faithful servants doubled the talents given them because they invested everything, they risked everything with nothing more than the hope of gaining more. The manner in which we live our faith must be just as bold, just as reckless. We must be willing to lose everything for Christ in order to gain everything. If we follow the wisdom of the world we will lose all that we think we have; but if we follow the way of Christ we will gain everything.

If we desire to be with him in heaven then we must live "in this world according to his way living."⁹ Let each of us cry out, "Your servant, Lord, your servant am I" (Psalm 116:16); "I come to do your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7).

⁷ *Ibid.*, Audience Address, 12 November 2008.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*