

33rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME YEAR A HOMILY 2020

BE READY TO USE ONE'S GIFTS WELL

Mt 25.14-30 Prov 31.10-31 1Thess 5.1-6

Welcome once more, to those near and far, including Jeanie in Perth, along with our other interstate and international friends, to our virtual celebration of Eucharist in this penultimate week of the Church's Year A, as this year's cycle of Matthew's Gospel ends next Sunday, with the Feast of Christ the King.

With the state of Victoria, including the city of Melbourne, the good news is that we are down to zero new coronavirus infections and no more COVID deaths for the last few weeks, we are feeling the freedom of opening up from the heavy lockdown of the last 8 months carefully. While the price has been heavy, financially, as well as the psychological effects and general stress being so great for so many, the positive results would seem to vindicate the severity of the restrictions we have all had to face and observe. At least, we could still get out for a walk and a bit of fresh air and exercise!

What it means for us now is that from the weekend of 28-29th November, it is anticipated that 100 may attend church services, so that we hope to open up for Mass at the normal weekend times from then. We were thinking of having outdoor Masses from this weekend, where 50 could attend, but with a forecast of 70% likelihood of rain, and Melbourne weather in general, it makes more sense to just wait out the next 2 weeks, and start booking in from 23rd November. We have resumed weekday Masses for up to 20 from Wednesday to Friday from this week (except for Friday 13th November, when I had a tragic funeral elsewhere), but will continue to provide video recorded Masses on the parish website for those who cannot attend in person.

Also, now finally, there is more certainty, arrangements are in hand for First Eucharist and Confirmation candidates to receive and celebrate their sacraments in December, before the end of the school year, although with restricted numbers, so it can't be business as usual! Small group Baptisms resume from this Sunday, 15th November.

And so we gather in spirit and pray together. It's great to have you with us.

The theme of these last few weeks amounts to a call to being alert, responsible, responsive and active in living as faithful disciples of Jesus. The end times are not in fact near, and our responsibility is to live life well and make the most of the opportunities with which we are provided, and to use our gifts and talents well.

Some time ago, I came across an article about two unlikely friends, who had responded to tragedy in their lives, in a most unexpected but inspiring and exemplary way. Bassam Aramin is a Palestinian Muslim aged 52, living in Jericho, and Rami Elhanan (coincidentally meaning *mercy* or *love* in Arabic), an Israeli Jew aged 70, living in Jerusalem. Bassam had spent 7 years in his youth in an Israeli prison for throwing a hand grenade at an Israeli jeep. Watching *Schindler's List* (based on Tom Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*) in prison moved him to pacifism and an understanding of the horrors and evil of the Holocaust. Rami had worked in a tank repair unit during the 3 week 1987 Arab Israeli War. Moving forward to the late 1990's, Rami's daughter Smadar was killed in a suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem.

They met in 2005, at a gathering of *Combatants for Peace*, an Israeli-Palestinian movement of ex-fighters committed to non-violence, and became firm friends. Then, further tragedy struck, when, in 2007, Bassam's 10 year old daughter, Abir, was killed by an Israeli rubber bullet near her school. He then also joined *The Parents' Circle* (a group of 600 families bereaved during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). At first he had thought: "*I'm sorry, I'm not Jesus*", in terms of feeling a deep sense of anger and hatred, but then moved to thoughts of peace and reconciliation, with his conclusion now: "*Afterwards, my life became my message.*"

No doubt, either loving father could have gone either way, in seeking revenge, or deciding on a better way of working for reconciliation and a change of attitudes, wanting the best for the future of their families, despite their devastating losses. Says Bassam, "*Revenge is a weapon of weak people.*"

Since then, they have joined forces to travel the world in a mission to speak against violence and reflect on its futility, in the way vengeance only provokes more devastation, hatred and loss of life. Proclaiming peace, humanity, sanity and human understanding is their mission and they do it well, with great credibility,

particularly given their own personal suffering and loss. (*Apeirogon* is the title of the book written about them by Irishman Colum McCann).

It might be a bit of a leap to today's parable about the talents, but, to my mind, whilst neither father in this story was Christian by creed, each reflects the use of their personalities, life experiences and talents for a fundamentally good cause, of encouraging forgiveness and peace, in their reaction to personal tragedy, bringing light and hope from darkness and loss, a message at the heart of Jesus' teaching, at the core of his law of love.

The parable of the talents provides us with the origin of the word *talent* in the English language. It apparently denoted a rather large amount of money, so even the poor chap who got the one talent was given significant responsibility, but was paralysed by fear into inaction. It could be argued, at least he protected it, and didn't waste it, returning it to the master in the end, so he wasn't all bad, and yet still gets cast out into the darkness. Let's not take it all too literally!

On the other hand, the chaps who got the bigger number of talents, were presumably considered more capable and industrious, in terms of what they might do with what they were given. Then again, it could be misinterpreted as Jesus endorsing capitalism and profiteering (with remarkable 100% profits!), on behalf of a greedy and rapacious absentee landlord, but this hardly fits the image of a loving and forgiving God, nor the general tone of Jesus' preaching and teaching, as we near the end of his public ministry in Matthew's Gospel. It's obviously more about making active use of our talents, reflecting the fruits of the Spirit in our daily lives.

As for the scripture scholars, Brendan Byrne SJ sums up the message as a summons from Jesus to us all to make "*productive use of the time before the coming of the Lord*", but let's not hold our breath for that! Meanwhile, he suggests: "*The gifts, God has entrusted to us, like our minds and limbs, need active exercise, if they are not to atrophy and wither.*" Donald Senior CM says it's about "*Living in an active and responsible manner while awaiting the end time, doing good and using the gift and opportunities God gives... alert and active.*"

And so we anticipate the Last Judgement message of next week's Gospel!

john hannon

15th November 2020