

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time A
Prov 31:10-13,19-20,30-31; 1Thess 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30
November 19, 2023

A reunion took place of the pupils of a famous school run by a religious order. An elderly priest, who had come back to be present at the reunion found himself surrounded by many former pupils whom he hadn't seen since he left the school many years ago. It was obvious from the way they flocked to him that he enjoyed great respect among them.

He received them with graciousness. Then, without the slightest prompting from him, they began to pour out their stories. One was an architect who had built a number of buildings, including two churches. Another was the head of a business company that had branches in over a dozen countries. Another was a highly successful farmer. Another was a bishop. Another was the principal of a very prestigious school.

The old priest listened with pleasure to the impressive litany of successes and achievements of his former pupils. There didn't seem to be a single failure among them. If there were any such people among his former pupils, it was obvious that they hadn't shown up at the reunion.

As they told their stories, he said little, contenting himself with nodding his head and smiling. When they had finished he complimented them on their achievements. Then, looking at them with affection, he said, "And now, tell me what you have made of yourselves?"

A long silence followed.

They were reluctant to talk about themselves. They were so absorbed in their careers that they had neglected their personal lives.

Their energies were so focused on being competent and successful that they didn't have time to grow emotionally, with the result that in terms relationships, many of them were impoverished.

The painter Picasso said, "*It's not what an artist does that matters, but what **he is.***" Though Picasso's paintings are worth millions, he wasn't as successful in his personal life. In fact, his personal life was something of a disaster area.

People may have done great things in their public lives, but failed in their private lives. Most people who are successful at their careers leave their personal lives a long way behind. Their successes are often achieved at the expense of their personal lives.

In the Gospel we just heard, Jesus talks about three people who were given different talents. He praises (commends) the first two because they used their talents. And he criticizes the third because he buried his talent.

When Jesus talks about talents, we must not think he means a musical talent, a talent in sports, or talent in business matters. Such talents are important, and we should recognize those who possess them, develop them, and use them. But these talents are greatly over-valued and over-rewarded in our society (time). Jesus' parable goes much deeper, for ultimately, the only thing that matters is what we make of ourselves.

However, we are mistaken if we think our goal in life is about making something of oneself in a material sense, though we should try to better ourselves. (this shouldn't be ruled out.)

The woman spoken about in the First Reading could hardly be described as being either successful or famous. Yet, she is held up as a model. Why?

Because she is the type of person she is ... industrious, caring, wise, and virtuous. She possesses something more valuable than wealth or beauty. She possesses a loving heart.

She has put her talents at the service of her family, her neighbors, and in caring for the poor and the needy. Hence, she has the respect of the entire community.

Life is God's gift to us. What we do with life is our gift to God.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.