

Sunday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time – A
Fr. Chad S. Green
Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
19 November 2017

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
Psalm 128
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
(John 15:4a, 5b) Matthew 25:14-30

The Parable of the Talents – No One Can Share Your Gifts for You

In the Introductory Rites at the beginning of Mass, one of the first things that we do together is make a Penitential Act. The priest invites everyone with these words:

Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries.ⁱ

Then the priest continues with one of three options; many times, this is the *Confiteor* prayer, which is the Latin word for the beginning of the prayer, meaning: “I confess...” We prayed this together at the beginning of Mass today:

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do...

It’s that line: “...in what I have done and in what I have failed to do...” that I will focus on in relation to today’s Gospel.

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Perhaps, when we think of sin, what comes more readily to mind are the things in the first part of that line: what we “have done.” Some act that we committed; that we recognize as wrong; that we feel sorry for. Something that can be identified with breaking one of the Ten Commandments, such as: missing Mass on Sundayⁱⁱ; disrespecting one’s parentsⁱⁱⁱ; being unfaithful to one’s spouse^{iv}; stealing^v; gossiping about another person.^{vi} These types of sins are in the category of sins of commission; an act that I have committed; something wrong or evil that

I “have done.”^{vii} These types of sins can be easier to call to mind, clearly identify, confess, and make a resolution to turn away and avoid in the future.^{viii}

But as we’ve already recognized, in the *Confiteor*, we not only confess what we “have done,” we also confess what we “have failed to do.” So, what do we mean by that? Whereas *committing* an evil act is a sin of *commission*, failing to do something good when we have the opportunity – that is, *omitting* a good – is called a sin of *omission*.^{ix} Omitting a good from my life can be just as serious as committing an evil. This is why, at the beginning of Mass, in order to acknowledge our need for God’s mercy, forgiveness, and His help – both to avoid evil and to do good^x – we confess both kinds of sins: what we “have done” and what we “have failed to do.”

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The parable from last week and the parable from this week together demonstrate for us that it is not enough to simply sit back and avoid doing evil. Rather, it is a necessity for us to actively pursue doing good. The five foolish virgins from last week were not committing an objectively evil act. But it was their omission, their negligence of tending to the lamps of their souls that was their sin. They allowed the oil in the lamps of their souls to run low, and their flame of faith, hope, and love to diminish and burn out.^{xi} The harsh lesson they learned was that the five wise virgins could not fill the lamp of their soul for them.^{xii} No one else could fill the lamp of their soul. It was something only they could tend to.

Last week, I preached about a spiritual conference given to us by a priest at my seminary, Mount Angel in Oregon.^{xiii} One year ago, at the start of the new seminary year, he welcomed us back to the seminary after being away for the summer. He gave us encouragement for the new year and reminded us of the many resources available at the seminary to help us grow in holiness and better discern if God was calling us to be ordained priests. But what I most remembered was

that he said to us that, if we wanted to grow in holiness, he couldn't do it *for us*. He could help us, he could teach us, he could give us advice, he could support us – but he couldn't do the actual work of growing in holiness *for us*. He couldn't study *for us*; he couldn't make healthy decisions *for us*; he couldn't get to bed on time and up on time *for us*; and – most importantly – he couldn't pray *for us*. We had to come to Mass and prayer; we had to spend time in the chapel; we had to have personal conversations with God. These are the things it would take to keep the lamp of our souls filled with oil and burning brightly as we discerned God's call in our life.

Just like the seminary, here at Holy Family Parish and throughout our Archdiocese we have many resources to help us grow in holiness. But it is up to us to make the decision to take advantage of the opportunities to learn about our faith; to increase our hope by participating in the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation; and to grow more loving by serving one another. No one can do it *for us*. It's up to us to prepare our heart and soul to receive Jesus.

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A similar lesson can be learned from today's parable. It is simply not enough avoid doing evil – we must do good with the valuable “talents” and gifts that God has given us. We cannot bury them in the ground.^{xiv} The gifts that God gives us are really not for us to keep – they are for us to share and give to others.^{xv} In that way, it becomes a “double-or-nothing” proposition. Just as the parable describes, when we share our gifts, they become a double blessing^{xvi} – for us and for the other. When we hold our gifts back, they are wasted, and they become a sin of omission.^{xvii} A missed opportunity to share and do good in the world. A missed opportunity to shine the light of goodness in the world.

And, just as no one can fill the lamp of our soul *for us* – no one can share our gifts *for us*. There are many resources at our parish and throughout our Church to help us develop our gifts –

but no one can share our gifts *for us*. We have to share our gifts so that they can be given away again and again.

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The month before I arrived here at Holy Family, we began praying the Holy Family Parish Prayer during every single Mass and often at the beginning of parish meetings and events. In the past five or six months, this prayer has been prayed hundreds of times by thousands of people here at Holy Family Parish. The heart of the prayer is two-fold: first, asking the Holy Spirit “to help each of us take our next step in following Jesus”; second, to “live and share the joy of the Gospel with others.”^{xviii} This is certainly a prayer to help all of us take a step away from sins of commission; to separate us from any wrongs or evils in our life. But it is also a prayer to help all of us take a step away from sins of omission; to help us share goods with others. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us take our next step – not just a step away from evil – but also a step forward toward doing good.

ⁱ *Roman Missal*, The Order of Mass No. 4

ⁱⁱ Exodus 20:8-10; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; CCC 2180ff, 2189, 2192

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; CCC 2214ff, 2247, 2248, 2251

^{iv} Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; CCC 2380, 2381, 2400

^v Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19; CCC 2401, 2450, 2453, 2454

^{vi} Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20; CCC 2464, 2504, 2507

^{vii} See J. Delaney, “Omission” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911): “...a sin of commission...involves a positive taking up with evil.”

^{viii} See *Act of Contrition*: “I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.”

^{ix} See J. Delaney: “...a leaving out of good...”

^x See Psalm 34:15; 37:27; 1 Peter 3:11

^{xi} Matthew 25:3, 8

^{xii} Matthew 25:9

^{xiii} Father William Dillard, *Spiritual Conference*, Saint Joseph Chapel, Mount Angel Seminary, Saint Benedict, Oregon, 12 September 2016

^{xiv} Matthew 25:18

^{xv} See Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:10

^{xvi} Matthew 25:16, 17, 20, 22

^{xvii} Matthew 25:28

^{xviii} *Holy Family Parish Prayer*, Holy Family Parish, Kirkland, Washington