THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026

Today's first reading is a lesson consisting of excerpts from chapter 31 of the Book of Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs ends with praise of a Good Wife, and surely few things are better for a man than a Good Wife. Why? She is competent. She is good at doing many things, and so is a good life partner for the man. No man and no woman is good at everything, but a good man is good at several things, and his wife can find security in his general competence. Similarly, a good woman is good at several things, and her husband can find security in her general competence. In today's Gospel, one of the Gospel passages that blesses honest and charitable capitalism, the Lord presents a proverb praising a man who invested well the money entrusted to him. The parable lesson applies to things other than money, of course, but the point is clear. God wants us to find out what jobs we are good at, and to do those jobs well. Day in and day out, our main work of justice is contributing to our family's good and to the common good by doing our tasks well, whether they are household tasks or jobs in the marketplace. Day in and day out, our main work of charity is doing the work that enables our families and coworkers to flourish. What does the Lord want us to do today? He wants us to do our work well, whether it is mopping the floor or managing money.

I am very fond of the Book of Proverbs. I have liked it ever since the day in my youth when I found in Proverbs a biblical response to critics of my youthful fondness for weightlifting, *A young man's glory is his strength" (immediately followed by a verse more appropriate for me today, "An old man's glory is his grey hair") There is much practical wisdom in the Book of Proverbs (such as "he hates his son who spares the rod" - kids need discipline!), and it is a matter of mild regret to me that we read so seldom from the Book of Proverbs at Mass, just three passages at daily Mass every other year in the 25th week of Ordinary Time, and once every three years at Sunday Mass on this Sunday, the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. We don't hear from the magnificent 8th chapter of Wisdom, when, in an Old Testament anticipation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, we learn that Wisdom is Person, sharing in God's eternity. At least today, optionally on the Memorials of married women saints, and optionally at Wedding Masses, we hear from the beautiful praise of a Good Wife in chapter 31 of Proverbs.

At one level, of course, the Good Wife of Proverbs 31 is, quite literally, any good wife. She is hard working and competent, and is neither physically nor spiritually a pushover. As a kid, before I had entirely decided to accept the call to sacred celibacy and the Roman Catholic priesthood, I liked Proverbs 31:17, "she clothes her loins with strength and makes her arms strong." If I were to marry, I thought, it wouldn't be to the legendary Mongolian princess who promised only to marry the man who could beat her in a wrestling match, but it also wouldn't be to some timid creature whose default response to a crisis is screaming or fainting. If she could apply a headlock when called for, that would be all to the good, I thought. More seriously, the point of Proverbs 31 is that the good wife is far from merely ornamental. She has her jobs in the family economy, and she does them well. She is confident and competent and can, as we say, take care of herself in a tight spot. Naturally, something similar is true of the good husband. He also "clothes his loins with strength and makes his arms strong." Not every husband needs to be able to wrestle an opponent to the ground and choke him out, but every husband needs to be able to handle a crisis without panic or dither. Being physically capable is good, but the main point is that the good husband is also far from merely ornamental. He has his jobs in the family

economy, and he does them well. He also is confident and competent and even, when the occasion calls for it, a bit dangerous, not someone to be taken lightly.

Chapter 31 of Proverbs is about the Good Wife, first of all. It stands as a correction to the tendency of various cultural moments to regard wives as ornamental creatures, an error particularly common in religions and societies that are guilty of the mistake of polygamy. The good wife contributes actively and powerfully to the common life of the family. Since the New Testament describes the Christian Church as the Bride of Christ, we can, I think, take Proverbs 31 is applying to the Church. The Church has some work to do in this world, and like the Good Wife of Proverbs 31, the Church needs to do her work well, with confidence and competence. Precisely because the Church loves her bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church should strive to do every task as perfectly as possible. Out of delight in the Bridegroom, the singers try to hit every note correctly. Out of joy in the Spouse, the Priest and other ministers at the Altar try to have a certain strength and elegance in their bodily gestures, almost as if they were dancing. Out of enthusiasm for the Lord, her preachers prepare their sermons and homilies diligently, for the benefit of their hearers but also for the pleasure of the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world. Feeding babies, bandaging wounds, writing books, and mopping floors, all of her ministers strive to do their work with excellence, for the sake of the Beloved Lord. This, at least, is certainly how it should be. The Church is not merely ornamental. She has work to do in this world, and sometimes even opponents to fight - according to the rules and in charity, surely, but also with determination and enthusiasm. Earthen vessel though she is, the Church has been entrusted with the treasure of Salvation, and is to defend that treasure. She has a vital role to play in God's economy of Salvation, and she needs to play it well.

Applying in one way to the Church, Proverbs 31 applies in another way to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spouse of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 31:26 declares that the teaching of kindness is on the Good Wife's tongue, and Mary surely taught saving kindness in John 2:5, when she said "Do whatever He (Jesus) tells you." The inspired author of Proverbs (traditionally King Solomon) said of the Good Wife "you surpass them all" (Proverbs 31:28) In parallel to this, the Archangel Gabriel said to Mary "Most blessed are you among blessed women" (Luke 1:42). As children of Mary, being adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, we do what Proverbs foretold, *Her children will rise up and call her blessed" (Proverbs 31:28), and what Mary herself foretold, "All generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

A marvelous book full of practical advice for daily living, the Book of Proverbs is also mystical, revealing Wisdom as a personal entity coeternal with God, an early anticipation in the Old Testament of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. The Book of Proverbs ends beautifully, with praise of a Good Wife, praise that can be applied in a sense also to a good husband, in another sense to Jesus Christ's holy Church, and in yet another to our Lady, Blessed Mary.