Week 33 Ordinary Time Year A - 2026

Proverbs 31; Ps 127; Thess 5:1-6; Matt 25:14-30

'An excellent wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels'[1]

The excellent wife is not a person, she is Wisdom, and she closes the Book of Proverbs. Wisdom is one of the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is to grow closer to God by recognising what leads towards Him and what comes from Him. The Catholic Catechism states that:

> *'Man participates in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator who gives him mastery over his acts and the ability to govern himself with a view to the true and the good.'*[2]

So, Wisdom is diligent in her work, she is late to bed and early to rise. She is productive and generous. She works to clothe those who wear her with dignity, she feeds those who come to her with good food for the mind and heart. She provides all nature of spiritual profit for those who will receive her. Those who know her, love her, and those who love her bear witness to her with their lives.[3] And fear. Wisdom is demarcated by 'fear of God' as it says in the proverb: 'a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.' That this fear of God as a good thing is also stated in the very first line of Psalm 128 '*Blessed are all two fear the LORD.'* It goes on to say that this fear will be rewarded with a '*Wife like a fruitful vine'*. This does not mean a wife of the flesh, but again, Wisdom.

In these two Old Testament writings '*Fear of God*' and '*Wisdom*' seem to be almost like spouses, walking hand in hand and inseparable, intimate. Why is this? Fear of God does not mean simply a fear of punishment, certainly not in its most elevated form. *Fear of God* should mean four things for us:

1) **Awe and reverence** before the infinite majesty of God
2) **Deep humility** — recognising that God is Almighty and we are creatures entirely dependent on Him
3) **Hatred of sin** —because sin offends the One who is infinitely good and deserving of all our love
4) **Wonder and awe** at the holiness and transcendence of God,

Do you understand why 'Fear of God' is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Such a fear motivates us to what is Good, and to flee from what is evil. How would your day look, and the things you had to do in it, if this was your first thought? And if this is your first thought, perhaps you can see how Wisdom accompanies her: your energies become tirelessly focused on pleasing God above all else. It will drive you into the face of the hurricane if necessary, and set you at peace in the middle of times of war.

As you read St Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, you will realise that he is telling his listeners to be wise: to prepare for the coming of Jesus, and to prepare in the fear of God, to 'keep awake and be sober.' This is also the Gospel, to which we now turn.

The Master is, according to St Gregory Nazianzen ''Our redeemer'.[4] His going away, is his ascent into heaven. His return is when he comes in judgement. 'What have you done with my gifts?' he asks. The Church Fathers are united in their understanding that although a 'talent' is a unit of money, it is not money

[1] Proverbs 31
[2] CCC 1954
[3] (The reading we have at hand is too abridged to do her honour, go and read the whole of verse 31 after you have returned to your homes.)
[4] St Thomas Aquinas, Catena Aurea: St Matthew Chap XX ver 14-30

that is being measured in the Gospel. Exactly what the talents represent is not entirely clear, but they are a precious gift, and they are to be used wisely. Wisdom begets wisdom. To bury away what God has given us is to despise God, and certainly not to fear him. It is interesting that in the Gospel the servant who has done nothing with his talent says that he did so because he was 'afraid'. Clearly, he had neither the Wisdom to do what he knew his master expected of Him, nor did he have sufficient Fear or love of his master that he should try to please him. He *is* worthless.

I select an example of value in St Bernadette of Lourdes. She had no education, so she had no knowledge and she was illiterate. But she did have Wisdom. She knew that the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary came to her from God and she responded. She also had a Fear of God, knowing that whatever it cost her she was to speak about what had been entrusted to her. She knew from the whole impulse of her life that she loved God above all else and that to do anything less than respond to his call to her would be a failure of love. For those of you who do not know her story, there is plenty to read, and so I commend you to go and discover it, seek your own Wisdom. For those who know her story, re acquaint yourself with it, so that when Jesus comes in judgement to those who fear him he will say: '*Well done, good and faithful servant.'* Finally, the last line of the Book of Ecclesiasticus*: 'In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.'*[5]

[5] Eccl 7 - end