

HOMILETICS

By

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I. HOMILIES FOR OCTOBER

A LOVING RESPONSE

October 1, 1978: Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The Human Situation: Juan was born of a Catholic father who had deserted the faith. Yet as a child he was deeply impressed by a teacher's quoting the First Letter of St. John: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God" (1 Jn. 4:16). But he later abandoned his Christian upbringing and tried pantheism, occultism, and various religions of the Orient. He found no permanent peace in them, for they left him empty. He finally bought a Bible and imbibed the word of God. This soon led him into contacts with Catholic books and persons, who in turn led him into the one fold of Christ, the Ideal for which he had spent so many years in search. To give a total and loving response to God, he offered himself as a lay-missionary without pay in a difficult mission field, and has found fulfillment at last in doing the will of the Father.

The Good News: Which of the two sons in today's gospel acted properly toward their father, who rightly could expect help from his sons in the work of the vineyard? To tell the truth, neither of them. The first flatly refused at the outset, involving a great lack of respect and obedience. The second gave his father the polite impression that was going to obey him, but in fact flatly refused to do so. Only the first came to his senses and acquiesced to his father's wishes. Neither of them gave a prompt, loving response to the one to whom they owed everything.

Let us consider the second son at first. He symbolizes many a Christian in our own days. When God grants favors and joys, they are all in praise of his goodness. But when he asks something difficult in their lives, such as the keeping of a difficult

commandment, or heeding the voice of the Vicar of Christ who beckons them to follow the straight and narrow path, or again, when God asks humble submission when in his wisdom he sends trials and sorrow as a cross to be shouldered, there are those who externally say nothing, and seem to acquiesce to the will of God by going along with what is demanded or required by law, yet inwardly they are resentful, morose and even bitter against God for making such demands on them. Their response to God's love, far from being loving and willing, is warped, insincere, unsubmitive.

There are others, and these are symbolized by the first son, who at the outset rebel at anything which seems to restrict their so-called freedom, and they are impulsively reluctant to accept any authority over them when it goes against their grain, even though that authority represents God's own. They chafe at any demands made on their exaggerated opinion of personal dignity. Yet, in moments of sensible reflection, they come to realize the folly of it all, and moved by the divine Spirit, allow the grace of God to touch them to sincere repentance. Responding lovingly to the Savior's call to repentance, they turn to the Father as the prodigal son with whole-hearted contrition and sorrow. This is what the Lord commends in today's first reading, for he says that as a loving Father he will wipe away all the sins of the past and his child shall live anew in love and grace. Many of the saints on our altars today were once rebellious to God's will, yet in the course of their lives, they came to their senses and learned to lovingly respond to the Father who is all-loving and all-wise.

What is desired by the Spirit, urging all God's children to live the Christ-life, is this loving response to the Father, be it in innocence or in repentance. Today's second reading gives us the superb example of Jesus who became obedient unto death, even to death on the cross. This entailed a constant living of that response all through life, so that when in the garden of Gethsemani, the awful spectre of the imminent crucifixion stood before his mind's eye. Jesus begs the Father to let the chalice pass, but at once submits to the Father's will. By that loving obedience, it was granted to him to become the source of eternal salvation for all who accept him (Hb. 5:9). The Blessed Mother manifested that same loving response, not only in that crucial moment when the greatness of God's demands were revealed to her at the annunciation, but all through life culminating at the foot of the cross, when it was most crucifying to carry out that "fiat": your will be done. But that loving response won for her the privilege of becoming the Mother of all God's children and the Queen of the universe.

Our Response: Who has not experienced the inner peace and strength of soul when submitting to a difficult carrying-out of God's demands in life? God never asks something more than we can bear up with, though it is by the help of the Spirit that we do so. The Father asks his children to work in his vineyard, some in this way and some in that. Nature will often rebel and assert its egoism, but following our better judgment, we know that true peace and fulfillment consist in doing at all times the will of the Father as Jesus has done for our example.

RESPONSIBLE ACTION

October 8, 1978: Twenty-Seventh Sunday

The Human Situation: Who is not horrified on seeing a driver of a car who, under the influence of drink or drugs, smashes at top speed into the car of a law-abiding citizen and thus deprives a wife and family of its only means of livelihood? Who is not angry at the irresponsible husband who gambles away his weekly salary, leaving the family in dire need, or at the irresponsible wife who lets the small children run wherever they want to, regardless of speeding cars or other dangerous situations? And who can condone the reckless youth, who courts danger to himself and to others by his careless habits? It is only responsible action that will build a better world and serve mankind properly.

The Good News: Today's gospel-message demands such responsible action in the use of God's talents and gifts which he has given to each one, to share the responsibility of the world in which he has put us. The leaders of Israel of old showed a great lack of responsibility in the charge entrusted to them, though the Lord sent them reminder after reminder, as we heard in the reading of the gospel. God is all-kind and generous but he will not be mocked. He does demand a proper use of his gifts and a proper return of his talents. He does expect the fruit of our labors. Today too, God sends us many reminders of our duties and obligations to serve him with a deep sense of responsibility, by serving well our fellowmen. Again and again we hear his message from the lips of his representatives, both religious and civil. Then too his voice can be perceived in the signs of the times: the agony of nations troubled for years by wars and blood; the spectre of high inflation and lack of employment; the threat of a global nuclear war.

The Christian calling is a great gift of God. He expects all to be the salt of the earth in order to give it a Christian savor. Responsible Christian living demands that each one work in the

Lord's vineyard according to the role and the capacity he has been given from on high, be it a professional one such as doctor, nurse, lawyer, architect, teacher, security-guard or public official; or be it the humble role of housewife, day laborer in office or farm bus or jeepney driver. All make up God's kingdom on earth, and are working in his vineyard to bring him the desired results of their labors, the fruit that he expects of them. We do not want him to reproach us as he did Israel in the reading when he said: "What have I done for my vineyard that I have not done? I expected it to yield grapes. Why did it yield sour grapes instead?" We do not want the punishment meted out of Israel's leaders for their lack of cooperation with the Lord's gifts, for their refusal to carry out their responsible role.

Many Christians feel the need of cooperating better with the Lord by more responsible action in their line of work, and by reaching out more generously to their fellowmen in a service of understanding love. But they lack the courage and strength to do so. Then St. Paul's words in the second reading comes to the rescue: "If there is anything you need, pray for it, and peace will guard your hearts and thoughts". Prayer! The infallible means to obtain a renewed sense of responsibility in all our dealings with God, and in all our dealings with our fellowmen. God will be understanding and overlook our shortcomings, if we really endeavor to carry out his will. When we realize what a privilege it is to work for the Lord, to share his responsibility for building our world, will we put forth all our efforts with responsible action. Then the Lord will receive the proper return of the fruits of our labors.

In a lighthouse, the reflectors behind the light must reflect in the proper direction if those at sea are to see the safe way that leads to port. So it is with the life of Christians. They are the reflectors which reflect or ought to reflect Christ the Light to those journeying on the sea of life. If they reflect that Light properly, those with whom they come in contact will not lose the way but continue on the correct path that leads to the eternal port. If we do not reflect that Light but let a sinful life darken the reflector, many perhaps will never reach the eternal port, and we will be made responsible by them before God's judgment seat.

Our Response: Taking up St. Paul's exhortation, let us lift up our hearts to the all-powerful God, and to the all-loving Savior. Let us get down on our knees and beg him for the gifts of his Spirit, for a renewal of awareness of our responsibilities in the role given us on this earth. There is no prayer that goes unheeded by the

Father in heaven. He will impart the Spirit of counsel and fortitude to ourselves and to our youth, to husbands and wives, to young and old. And we will return to the Lord the fruit of our labors in his vineyard.

CHRIST'S WEDDING FEAST

October 15, 1978: Twenty-eighth Sunday.

The Human Situation: In many a country the wedding feast is celebrated amid great rejoicing. Much preparation has gone ahead, and when the happy day arrives, there is a special banquet with exquisite foods and drink, the presence of many invited guests, and everyone is in festive spirit. Yet it would be an insult to appear at the banquet improperly dressed. In fact everyone turns out in his or her best. All this is only to be expected. A wedding is the celebration of an event that is the beginning of a new community of love, the promise of new life in a new family, the mutual agreement to leave mother and father and launch out together on a new path. The banquet is the festive symbol of this happy event.

The Good News: Again and again in the Scriptures, God's relation to man has been depicted as a marriage. Hosea the Prophet (ch. 2) describes in a striking manner the God of love who seeks after Israel his unfaithful spouse. His love is more enduring than her unfaithfulness; with great patience he endeavors to win her back to himself. The same image is taken up by the Prophet Isaiah who has the Lord himself declare: "He who has become your husband is your Maker, his name is the Lord of hosts... For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back" (Is. 54:5,7). Again, the same Prophet declares: "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you" (62:4). That the sacred writers were inspired by the Spirit of God to adopt the image of marriage to show forth the covenant-union and love of God for his People proves how highly they esteemed marriage, and how great is the love of God for little man.

In the New Testament writings the theme heightens. Christ is the Bridegroom already in the Gospel of Matthew (7:15 but especially 25:1 ff). St. John explicitly refers to Jesus as the Bridegroom whom John the Baptist who is the Friend of the Bridegroom introduces (Jn. 3:29), and St. Paul could hardly have expressed it more forcefully than when he wrote to his Corinthian converts: "I have given you in marriage to one husband, presenting you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2). Finally in the book of Revelation, the wed-

ding of the Lamb with his Bride, the Church, is announced (19:7-9), and the New Jerusalem is "beautiful as a Bride prepared to meet her husband" (21:2). Marriage, as the sacred and permanent union of two in one, graphically depicts the unbounded love of God who desires to unite in closest union with himself all those who accept his call, in order to make them completely and permanently happy, fruitful in every grace and virtue.

Today's gospel celebrates this wedding of God's Son with those who are called to be one with him in that closest of unions. It is a parable with allegorical overtones, for it is evident that Jesus refers to himself as the King's Son, who welcomes all who are invited by his Father to union with himself. But many are indifferent to the great plan of God for them. There are so many other attractive amusements and pleasures today, that the spiritual side of life is often aside, neglected, rejected. Others are all taken up with business affairs and worldly pursuits, so as to have no time for God's call, no understanding of the mighty plan which would involve them in an eternal love affair with no one less than the good God himself, and his Beloved Son, Christ the Lord. They find it impossible to leave their selfish interests in order to come to Christ who alone can give them fulfillment that is all-satisfying and everlasting. Yet, the wedding of God's Son will be well attended after all. The simple of heart, the childlike in faith, the little man of the street and of field, whom no one regarded as worthy of notice, they, the humble and the lowly, will respond with alacrity to God's call of love, having understood that there is something more important in life than all that this world can offer, and having perceived that the spiritual call of faith far surpasses the offers of the present time. They respond to God's call, and come with gladness to share in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Even then, one must come to Christ's wedding-feast properly prepared. To neglect proper preparation and deportment in the inner sentiments of one's heart would betray great lack of respect for the Bridegroom who, although he is the meek and humble Savior of man, yet is also the Son of the Eternal Father and Lord of the universe. It is not at all difficult to obtain the proper "wedding garment" to enter into his presence, for it consists of inner dispositions of humble compunction for sins committed, and grateful love for the call that is holds out to them. Like Israel of old, the contrite soul returns to the Savior with chastened heart, and partakes of the bounty of the Lord in his Table of goodness here below, but above all in the eternal banquet of God's love in the mansion of the Father. There all will drink of the new wine which is the Spirit of festive joy and grateful love.

Our Response: The practical application of the parable would direct us to appreciate greatly the call of faith to the knowledge and love of God in his kingdom on earth, and an ever-growing deepening of our faith and love. Should the sacrament of reconciliation be the necessary means to regain the proper wedding garment, it is very easy to obtain. At any rate, all should attend the wedding feast with deep sentiments of grateful love for God's merciful kindness and infinite goodness.

GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S

October 22, 1978: Twenty-Ninth Sunday

The Human Situation: Sir Thomas More, a very successful lawyer in the days of King Henry the Eighth of England, was raised by him to be High Chancellor of all England. He endeavored most earnestly to be a loyal servant of the King, giving him his proper due in all things, until the King demanded something that Thomas in all good conscience could not give, namely, the oath of allegiance to his King as Supreme Head of the English Church. Here is where he owed higher allegiance to God in his conscience. So Thomas gave up his high office, was forced to leave his family for the dungeon, and finally gave his life for his convictions. Today he is a canonized saint on our altars.

The Good News: It is wrong to think that in today's gospel, Jesus is referring to a twofold diverse allegiance, one to the civil authorities and one to God. All authority comes from God, also that wielded by the State, for God has full claim on all men. If the government, that has been properly set up, wields authority over its citizens, it does so in God's name. If the citizens obey the just laws of the State, they are giving homage to God and offering him a true sign of worship. If they duly pay just taxes they are likewise giving honor and glory to God. But if they evade just and reasonable taxes imposed by the government, they are offending against God. Jesus clearly states that what belongs to the one in power ought to be given him.

But in the Gospel for today, Jesus also tells us to give to God what belongs to him. Are not God's claims on us universal? Yes, they are. We belong entirely to God, for he is our Creator, and Savior and Redeemer. Do we realize how much we are indebted to him as our Lord and Master? Who has given us being and existence, health and ability, sight and hearing, a mind to think and a heart to love? Who nurtured us from earliest years through

loving parents and dedicated instructors? Who fitted us out with various talents and capacities so that we can be of use in this world to our family and surroundings? Who, if not the good God, Creator of all, to whom we belong with our entire being.

Yet, the good Lord expects a voluntary response and willing service in return. If the image on the Roman coin in today's gospel was that of the Roman Caesar, then let the coin be returned in tribute to whom it belonged. But the image of god himself, holy and triune, is imprinted on each one of his children, for man "was made to the image and likeness of God". Then one ought to be intent with one's whole being to belong to God, giving him praise, thanksgiving and worship as he deserves. This we do by the sincere disposition of endeavoring to do his will and please him in all things, despite human weaknesses and shortcomings.

In a special manner we render adequate worship to God when we come to the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Beloved Son, and offer ourselves with him. This is the supreme and unique sacrifice of the New Covenant. We can give God no greater honor and pleasure than by uniting with the Lamb of God in this sacrificial act of offering. Our sincerity will also prove itself by our endeavor to live as God's children ought to, so that God's image becomes more and more resplendent in us, reflecting the goodness and justice of the all-holy God: Then we are bent on dealing honestly with our fellowmen in all private as well as business contacts, bent on letting God shine through us in works of charity toward the homeless and the helpless, bent on letting God's justice shown in our dealings with servants and employees, with loving-kindness toward all. Even necessary corrections toward children and household servants can manifest the holiness and justice of God. In all these acts of Christian perfection, we are giving glory and honor to God Most High by the bodily and spiritual faculties with which he has endowed us.

Our Response: A good reminder to give God all honor and glory is the little prayer said so often at the end of each decade of the Rosary: Glory be to the Father etc. A more solemn act is that which the celebrant utters in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, when at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer he says: "Through him (Jesus) and with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever." United with Christ we can, as baptized members of Christ, give the Father adequate honor and glory. What dignity, O Christian, do you possess!

LOVING GOD IN OUR NEIGHBOR

October 29, 1978; Thirtieth Sunday

The Human Situation: Tom Dooley the well-known doctor who spent his life aiding thousands of refugees in Vietnam and surrounding countries, till he himself succumbed to cancer, was brought once to a little child whimpering with pain in a dark and dank corner of a hut. Only after they had removed the cowdung that had been smeared all over the lad's back did they see the vermin all over his flesh. After cleansing him thoroughly, applying proper medication, giving him several blood transfusions and bundling him up with innumerable bandages, Doctor Dooley cried out: I do not know what this little wisp of a lad will grow up to be if he lives, but this I know: crying loudly from that little bundle of flesh was Christ in agony, and I know that what is done for the least of his brothers is done to him.

The Good News: Jesus places side by side the commandment of love of God and that of neighbor. And for him, neighbor is anyone in need. The two commandments are not to be separated. They form but two aspects of the one commandment of love, and have but one sole motivation: the love of God manifested in love for man. For man is the image of God, and God lives in man, and Christ died for him. One cannot love God whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother whom he has seen (1 Jn. 4:20). At the last judgment the Lord himself will pronounce sentence: "Away from me . . . away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels . . . I tell you indeed: whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me" (Mt. 25:41.45)

Do we really love God with all our heart as the commandment directs? That can only be proved by our love towards our fellow-men. This is the reason why men and women of all ages devote themselves to the sick and the aged, to the retarded and the insane. What other reason could they have in caring for drug addicts, alcoholics, and others who suffer from similar irregularities? If God himself has so loved man as to become his Brother, his Sacrifice and his very Food in the Eucharist, will little man not respond to love God with the whole heart by manifesting love to God's image on earth? Many professional persons also activated by the same

selfless love in their dealings with their fellowmen, such as doctors, lawyers, nurses, educators public officials. How well St. James shows us the necessity of action when it comes to living the Christian faith: "What good is it for someone to say: 'I have faith', if his actions do not prove it? Can that faith save him? Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them: 'God bless you! Keep warm and eat well', if you don't give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it alone and has no actions, it is dead," (Jam. 3:14-17). Rightly St. Paul declares: "What matters is faith that work through love". (Gal. 5:6)

Wealth is a passing thing; possessions cannot be taken beyond the grave. But love shown in good works towards one's fellowman will blossom for all eternity. Material possessions when used in this way can make one rich in God. Even those who do not abound in this world's goods can manifest love to others by seeing Christ on every street-corner, in every jeepney and bus, in the office and in the field, in the hospitals and in the apartment stores, at work and at recreation. Even a smile helps one's neighbors to bear one's daily burdens. On a hospital wall, a notice said: "If you are not smiling now, practice up for tomorrow"! Well said! We do need to practice smiling, so that it becomes second nature. And it is not difficult, if we are always smiling at Christ, living in his brothers and sisters.

Trouble-makers who deliberately start riots and unjust strikes are by no means loving God with all their heart. Employers who oppress their workers with poor conditions, low wages and meager benefits, by no means love God with all their heart. Land owners who squeeze every last bit out of their tenants without regard for their families and poor living conditions, are by no means loving God with all their heart. Yet, this is the first and greatest of all commandments, and God will not be mocked. Man must face his Maker one day and hear the sentence passed on him, accordingly as he endeavored to love, while on earth. Otherwise, all his success, all his fame, all his possessions will go up in flame.

Our Response: Man's fallen nature makes him downright selfish. The whole world has to revolve around his little ego and all its desires. Only when man begins to share the love of the Spirit of God, does he gradually throw off the narrowness of self-love and done the richness of God's universal love for all others. Then he is truly becoming a human person. Then he truly is becoming divine. Our resolve is self-evident.

II. HOMILIES FOR NOVEMBER

PIETY WITHOUT A SOUL

November 5, 1978: Thirty-First Sunday

The Human Situation: In the movie "The Godfather", there was an appalling scene at the end. The young "goodfather" was posing as a Catholic godfather to a child, who was being baptized at the baptismal font, and simultaneously the same man was engineering the ruthless murder of his opponents. Here was a real travesty of religion: posing as godfather in the sacred ceremony of baptism and in truth being a murderous villain.

The Good News: If anything is offensive to the Lord it is sham religion: an external show of piety with a complete lack of true religious sentiments in the heart. That is what the prophet decries in the first reading today: the people claim to be God's chosen ones, and come to his holy Temple, but make a mockery of the Lord by offering things totally unacceptable. The priests too are blameworthy for their lack of sincerity in carrying out their holy office.

This is what Christ holds against the Pharisees in today's gospel. They do not practice what they preach. Their piety is only external, and their motive for performing acts of piety is sheer vanity, to be seen by their fellowmen, to "show off" their piety on their sleeve. Such conduct is not done to please the Lord but to ingratiate themselves with men. They constantly need attention, marks of respect, flattery. They abuse the title of Rabbi and Teacher by their unworthy motives, and they do not deserve to be called father of the people, for they are far from representing God's fatherhood to his People. Such is the bane of hypocrisy, externalized piety without a soul. It is a shell without a body, a falseface hiding empty reality.

Is piety today sometimes used also as a false mask for the lack of true interior sentiments of religion? Do not people at times "salve" their consciences by some show of external piety such as donations to the Church or some good cause, yet with their name in large letters written all over the gift? "When you give alms" Jesus told his disciples, "do not sound the trumpet before you". In fact, he told them that their right hand should not know what their left hand is giving away, which is an emphatic way of saying that when they give alms they ought not make much over it; it ought to be so unnoticed that if possible one hand wouldn't know what the other was doing!

The Lord does not forbid external manifestation of piety with the proper intention, for he says in the Sermon on the Mount: "Your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Note well the motive which the Lord demands of us: our light is to shine in order to please God so that others are drawn to him. The pharisaic spirit on the contrary is centered on self. Actions of piety are done to win respect and praise for oneself. This is piety without a soul. It is not practiced to please God but to win the approval of men.

To be noted is also that the Lord does not forbid the use of the titles "father" and "teacher" in an absolute sense, as if they never were to be used, else even children could not address their parent as father, nor their educators as teachers. But this is absurd. St. Paul surely knew well the mind of Christ and still he could state: "Granted you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you have only one father: It was I who begot you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 4:15). What Christ reproves is the abuse of these titles as the Pharisees were doing, the craving for honor and adulation in the use of them without any respect to the Father in heaven from whom all fatherhood comes, or to Christ the one Teacher of mankind from whom all knowledge proceeds. The Christian priesthood uses these titles in complete dependence on Christ whom it represents.

Our blessed Savior concludes his exhortation today with his commendation of humble living: Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. The humble spirit is in direct contrast to the vain "show-off" which Jesus so sharply condemns. He has given a sublime example of sterling virtue, of hidden greatness, of humble living. Whatever he did was done to please the Father (Jn. 8:29).

Our response: We ought to take to heart the advice of the prophet Micah: "You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to act with justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). To walk humbly with God! That gives God, true honor and glory and engenders true peace of soul. For that is genuine piety.

BE ON THE ALERT

November 12th, 1978: **Thirty-Second Sunday**

The Human Situation: During World War II, some pilots stationed in England had trained their dog to pick up the sound of Nazi bombers crossing the English channel, and to utter short, sharp

barks when it did so. It was uncanny how quickly the extremely sharp ears of the dog could pick up the sound of enemy bombers when they were still far away. At once it sounded the alert. The Allied pilots rushed to their planes, and were often able to meet the enemy half way, and thus ward off much destruction of the mainland.

The Good News: Be on the alert? That is what the Lord is telling us in today's gospel. On the alert for his coming. For come again he will without any doubt, be it in the consummation of time, or for everyone of us at the moment of death. But even the People of God who have heard this warning again and again can so often let themselves be wrapped up in business pursuits, engrossed in educational progress, or enmeshed in pleasurable amusements, that their whole effort goes into the things of this life, good though those things may often be. Yet the Savior in his proclamation of the Good News continually tries to raise men's minds and hearts to the realization that life is but a preparation and a pilgrimage for the real life to come. Christ himself will come again to take his Bride, the Church, to the eternal wedding feast, but he will come suddenly and when least expected. That is why he sounds the alert.

The five bridesmaids who took no oil to refuel their lamps were irresponsible in their role as bridesmaids, because they were expected to be on hand with burning lamps to light the way, when the bridegroom was being escorted back to his house after coming for the bride. Sometimes the bridegroom in ordinary life dallied with his friends and came late at night, but at whatever hour he came, the bridesmaids had to be ready. Five of them in today's parable were wise enough to have the fore-thought that they might need more oil should he come late at night, and they brought along enough to re-fuel their lamps. They were alert, and when he came they were ready. Only those five were ushered into the home of the bridegroom for the wedding party. When the others returned it was too late. They had not played their role. They were excluded from the wedding party.

In a parable, one does not try to find a meaning for every detail. The lesson is drawn from the picture as a whole. Here the lesson is evidently the necessity of being prepared and on the alert at all times for the Big Event; it is not to the point to ask what the oil represents. That forms part of the picture. The lesson is evident. The People of God, who are the Spouse of Christ, are to be prepared at all times for his Coming, either as a whole or as individuals at the time of death. The best preparation for his

Coming is the daily endeavor to stay in God's friendship in the companionship of Christ, or to return to that friendship as soon as one becomes aware of having lost it through serious sin. This disposition of heart can be fostered at work or at play, in the midst of a busy city or in the quiet of the country-life. When St. Aloysius as a youth was engaged in a game of billiards, someone asked him what he would do if death summoned him at that moment. He replied that he would continue to do what he was doing, for it was being done for the love of God. Aloysius was always prepared for the Coming of the Savior, because he always endeavored to live in utter simplicity in union with Christ.

For the Christian, death is not the end. It is but the passage-way to true and lasting life. The Christian's real hope is not merely in a ripe old age, spent in happy retirement, but above all in the resurrection, which Christ has put before our eyes in his own glorious resurrection. The risen life is a total transformation of the whole man, fitted out with the splendor and glory of Christ. Well can we apply the words of Paul: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Then it will be seen and experienced how worth while was the preparation on earth of always being on the alert.

Our Response: It is a very wholesome practice to form the habit of making an act of perfect contrition for one's sins, or a sincere act of love of God each night on retiring. No one knows but God alone what the night will bring. How often people are whisked into eternity by a sudden fire, earthquake, landslide, or similar catastrophe. How often we read of road accidents or plane crashes! What a boon if man has always been on the alert. An act of sincere contrition or love of God each night on retiring, and each time one enters upon a journey, can insure a happy eternity for the pilgrim on this planet earth.

GOD-GIVEN GIFTS

November 19, 1978: Thirty-third Sunday

The Human Situation: It affords genuine pleasure to see a family in which the various members pursue their individual calling with eagerness and zest, developing their own capacities and gifts as far as in them lies: one preparing for medicine, another a teaching career, a nurse's profession, commerce, agriculture and so on. Mother and father are justly proud when they observe that their

children are developing in a healthy and mature manner, for they know that much depends on these years of earnest preparation. On the contrary, how grieved they are when one of the family turns out to be lazy and shiftless, unreliable and constantly dependent on parental care even in later years.

The Good News: Today's parable takes the word "talent" in its original meaning of a sum of money, which various translations give as "dollar" or "pounds" or "pesos". The owner of the money had in mind that his servants put his money to good use and thus increase his own possessions, according to the creativeness and ingenuity of each individual. Those who did so were well rewarded, but the lazy fellow who dug a hole and hid it away was rejected from his position, and the money which had been given him was taken away.

In today's parlance, the word "talent" has come to mean the gifts and capacities which each one possesses. In that applied sense, the lesson is also much to the point. All our gifts and "talents" are from the loving hand of the Creator. We are expected to use them well in this life, developing them for the good of the Kingdom, be it for the welfare of ourselves or our fellowmen. Severe judgment will be meted out to the lazy and good-for-nothing who never bothers to develop the abilities he has in any line whatever, or who deliberately abuses those gifts. Rejection from God's household is the threat hanging over him. Drug addicts, alcoholics, sex perverts and all such who abuse the gifts God has given them ought to realize that God is just and will not be mocked. He gave man a mind in order to let it share his creative power. He gave man his senses so that they might enjoy what is good, and help create a better world. He does not want his gifts to be abused.

Not everyone recognizes the fact that these gifts and abilities come from the hand of the Creator. Yet it is the Creator who enables man to invent the marvelous instruments which flood the market today: for education, for transportation, for hospital needs, for business purposes, for recreation. God in his goodness is working in man, his masterpiece, to bring about the continued marvels of our age. It is He who enlightens the mind to unravel the mysteries of his creation, so that man discovers more and more their value for life. Not to recognize the source of these gifts and abilities can lead to rank pride and vanity on man's part, as well as the presumption that he alone can do all things and there is no need of a God to care for him or show him how.

Today, such an attitude prevails in a great part of the world which no longer even believes in the existence of God, let alone

his marvelous providence in the care of man. Yet, how pernicious is this attitude is proving itself right and left. Just when man has discovered stupendous new aids for living, for health, for communication, for travel, all his technology seems to be threatened by an atomic conflagration, world economy is seriously in trouble ecology presents real problems for his continued existence, and many other problems are baffling man who all along refuses to acknowledge his dependence on his Creator and his continued need of him. What he needs to do is to gratefully acknowledge God's gifts and his continued activity, so that he work with his divine Creator in building up a new world of justice, peace and love. Such a spirit of gratitude makes use of each and every God given talent to benefit himself and all mankind. It also insures that all envy and jealousy of another's gifts and accomplishments are put definitely aside, because the same Creator is the source of them all.

One requisite for proper success in the use of God's gifts is hard work and perseverance. It can happen that the best student in the class is not always the most successful. Things have perhaps come too easy for him and he does not have the stamina to go through trials and difficulties which the student who is less talented but who doggedly determines to win does possess. Here the fable of the rabbit and the turtle illustrates our point: both began a race, but the rabbit laughed at the slowly plodding turtle, and, thinking it was a cinch to beat the turtle, he lay down and took a good sleep. Meantime the turtle plodded on, slowly but surely. When the rabbit awoke, the turtle had won the race.

Our response: It is not the turtle's pace that is commendable, but his persistence and constant endeavor. He kept on going, no matter what others were doing. And he won! God always rewards those of good will who make the best use of whatever gifts they have been given. Some have ten and others have five. Even the servant in the parable who only was given one, was expected to work just as hard as the others, and would have been rewarded accordingly. As it was, he received severe punishment and rejection. Our course is clear.

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

November 26, 1978: Solemnity of Christ the King.

The triumph of our Savior is celebrated today in all the world. It is a triumph of bloodshed and destruction, not bloodshed of people and enemies, but that of his own Blood which he shed on the Cross so as to win this signal victory. Not destruction of men

and women and cities, but that of Satan's hold on men and the consequences of that hold: sin and death. It is a triumph whereby he takes captive those whom Satan had imprisoned, and leads them from slavery to the freedom of the children of God.

Yet, the real triumph of the Savior, that which underlies all the rest, is a triumph of love. God's plan for man is one of singular love, Jesus, the Son of God, entered into this plan and brought the flame of love to a cold and darkened earth, to a mankind lost in the maze of sinful habits and dead-end pathways. The Jews were caught up in a labyrinth of laws, the pagans in a multiplicity of gods and goddesses, the Epicureans in crass materialism, the Stoics in cold indifference. Then the Son of God leapt down from his Father's bosom and flashed the message across the skies that would electrify the world: Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. As the Father has loved me, so do I love you. Love one another.

It was love that made him choose the humble birthplace of a sheep's cavern, the simple peasant life at Nazareth, the daily hard toll at the carpenter's bench, the long hours of trudging through hill and vale in Galilee, teaching, preaching and curing all manner of evils. It was love that gave him the stamina to face up to the mounting opposition of the leaders, the unbelief of the people, the cowardice of the disciples, the awful hours of agony and dereliction on the Cross. But love won out. And he rose triumphant from the grave, glorious and immortal, to begin his gigantic task of transforming mankind into a family of love, before handing it over as a Kingdom of love to the Father.

To accomplish this he gave his followers only one commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. By keeping this one commandment, his followers would serve one another in genuine love, and thus gradually transform the entire world. That service of love would be the norm by which he would judge them when he came again as triumphant King of the universe. Today's gospel depicts him seated in judgment. Those who have carried out his commandment of love by serving him in his countless members will be welcomed into his eternal Kingdom to share his divine riches in an atmosphere of divine love. Those who have not done so, are consigned to share the chastisements prepared for the devil and his angels.

Therefore now is the time of decision. Now is the time of action. True love entails suffering and self-sacrifice. That is everyone's experience. The gift of oneself is the true manifestation of love, even though it costs at times to continue giving oneself. Husbands and wives experience this, parents and children, employers and

employees, masters and servants, strangers and friends. In the gospel we are shown the motive enabling one to carry out this commandment of love: it is Jesus living in the hearts of every one of his members. Does he not say: I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, naked and you clothed me. And should one be surprised to hear such a statement from the lips of the King, he will tell him: As long as you did it to one of these my least brothers you did it to me. It is truly Christ who lives in the lowly and the forsaken, in the aged and the sick, in the distressed and the despairing, in the cultural minorities as well as in the affluent.

Are we going to enter into the triumph of Christ's love and help him shape up the family of God, thus preparing for his grand Parousia? Then we must be prepared to serve him in each and everyone of his members, no matter how repulsive to our senses or repellant to our pride. To give the words of Jesus a more modern touch, we might ask ourselves: have I ever tried to find a job for some jobless person, paid the bills of a family-father whose meager salary leaves him helpless to buy sufficient food or clothing, covered the hospital expenses of someone whose income could not cope with it, sponsored the education of some seminarian coming from a large family who found it difficult to come up with the monthly payments, given to the St. Vincent de Paul Society clothing that was not cast away but in top shape, yet superfluous as far as I myself was concerned? This is genuine Christian service of love. This is helping build the family of love, and establishing on earth the Kingdom of love, so that Christ may triumph as King of love. How happy shall we be to hear him speak those words: Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.