

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
2020—A Cycle Readings



“When one finds a worthy wife . . .”

Proverbs 31

Image courtesy of [Bennett Tobias](#) on [unsplash.com](#)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter’s path. Instinct says, “Chase after that link!” Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.

Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Post-election Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Dear God, Loving and Transforming Grace,
source of all creation, be with us now.
For many months, we have endured
the hard night of struggle for our nation’s soul,
searching for fonts of wisdom.

Some of us experienced moments of rejoicing
because our chosen candidate prevailed.
Some are mourning our candidate’s loss
and are now in the pit of despair.

Where do we go next?
How do we heal our nation’s wounds?
How do we become again a *united* nation?
On this and all days going forward,

let us look into each other's eyes
and find ways to join together
building the future we dream of.

Alone, we will surely fail.
Separated, we face chaos.
But together, summoning those better angels Lincoln spoke of,
may we yet redeem our country's greatest hope
of *one* nation, respectful of *all* people,
giving birth, again, to our nation's founding dream.
Amen.

by [Deborah Weiner](#) quoted in [US Catholic Magazine](#)

Introduction to the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings:

We are entering the final days of Ordinary Time in this year's liturgy—a year that has been *anything but* “ordinary.” Next weekend, we look forward to celebrating the Feast of Christ the King, our parish feast day. The following week, we will begin a new liturgical year (Cycle B) with the First Week of Advent.

A strong theme in the first two readings this weekend is a call for marital harmony. For some of us today, that ideal may be timely. For others of us, marital harmony may seem—or actually be—out of reach. Whatever our chosen relational choice and status, we can appreciate the first two readings from Proverbs 31 and Psalm 128.

Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 “When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls.”

Chapters 1-9 of the Book of Proverbs were added at a much later date (second century BC/BCE). Chapters 10-31 (including this weekend's passage) are centuries older. Ancient Israel regarded wisdom not merely as an intellectual reflection, an ideal far removed from daily life. Proverbs addresses how to organize one's life on a *day to day* basis. This wonderful book offers a meditation on the wisdom of God, from whom all human wisdom proceeds. The poem we reflect on this week contain the Proverbs' final words.

This book stems from a time in Israel when men held dominant power in the home. This particular poem focuses on the vocation of *married* women. It urges husbands to praise their wives and show them gratitude for all they are and all they do. Women managed the household, worked the orchards, and guided their children's steady growth to maturity. Typically, husbands spent their days at the village gate, discussing the news of the times with other men.

Psalm 128: 1-5 “Your wife, like a vine, will bear fruits in your home; your children, like olive shoots, will stand around your table.”

The psalmist parallels Proverbs’ theme in praise of women who care for their husbands, children, and homes.

First Thessalonians 5:1-6 “All of you are citizens of the light and the day; we do not belong to night and darkness. Let us not, therefore, sleep [*through life*] as others do, but remain alert and sober.”

Generally, the second scripture reading bears little in the way of *theme matching* with the other readings of a weekend liturgy in Ordinary Time.

Matthew 25: 14-30 “A man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.”

Before going further, watch/listen to a dramatization of the “[Parable of the Talents](#)” on You Tube (3 min.).

A Reading from the Book of Proverbs (31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31)

The woman of character, where is she to be found?

She is more precious than any jewel.

Her husband has complete confidence in her;
she will be of great benefit to him.

She brings him only good and not evil,
all the days of her life.

She has obtained wool and flax,
and works them with skillful hands

She puts her hand to the distaff*
and her fingers hold the spindle.

She reaches out her hand to the helpless
and gives to the poor.

Charm is deceptive and beauty useless;
the woman who is wise is the one to praise.

May she enjoy the fruits of her labor
and may all praise her for her works.

* a small stick used in the past for winding wool around when spinning

Personal Reflection

We need to take this beautiful wisdom poem in the context of when the author wrote it and the social context at that time. Also keep in mind that the references are to *married women*.

— *What is my first thought when I reflect on this passage?*

— *If I were a husband and father in ancient Israel, how might I react to this passage?
If I were a wife and mother in that same era, how might I receive these words?*

- Does the poem still have the ring of truth for me today, living as I do in a society where women still struggle for recognition and equality in the home, the workplace, and society as a whole?
- If am a husband, when was the last time I sincerely and specifically thanked my wife for all that she means to me and all she does for our family? Why not do it today?

Antiphon: Psalm 128 (1-5)

The blessings of home: a pilgrimage song.

Blessed are they who fear the Lord.

Blessed are you who fear Yahweh
and walk in his ways.
You will eat the fruit of your toil;
you will be blessed and favored.
Blessed are they who fear the Lord.

Your wife, like a vine,
will bear fruits in your home;
your children, like olive shoots,
will stand around your table.
Blessed are they who fear the Lord.

Such are the blessings bestowed
upon the man who fears Yahweh.
May Yahweh praise you from Zion.
May you see Jerusalem prosperous
all the days of your life.
Blessed are they who fear the Lord.

Personal Reflection

Again this poem/song merits the same sort of introduction as the first reading from the Book of Proverbs.

We need first to look at this passage within the context of when the psalmist wrote it (around 2,500 years ago). Consider the place of origin and the time at which the psalmist wrote it. Also keep in mind that, like the first reading, references concern *married women*. Only in that light can we probe it's meaning for ourselves and our world today.

Keeping in mind the varying status of women in cultures across the planet and my own:

- *What is my reaction upon reading this psalm's praise of married women?*

— *How might men today read and interpret this psalm?
How might women view it from their perhaps more personal experience and perspective?*

From the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians (5: 1-6)

“You do not need anyone to write to you about the delay [*in the Second Coming*] and the appointed time for these events. You know that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people feel secure and at peace, the disaster will suddenly come upon them, as the birth pangs of a woman in labor, and they will not escape.

“But you, beloved, are not in darkness; so that day will not surprise you like a thief. All of you are citizens of the light and the day; we do not belong to night and darkness. Let us *not*, therefore, sleep as others do, but remain alert and sober.”

Personal Reflection

Paul needed to clarify and reinforce his original teaching on the Second Coming (*Parousia*). Clearly, some in the Thessalonian community misinterpreted Paul’s teaching. He counsels the community in the final sentence to stay “alert” and “sober” (meaning calm and thoughtful). Twenty centuries later, we still need to take Paul’s advice. The “end” will occur in God’s good time.

— *If there still exist for me some areas of my own Catholic faith about which I am puzzled/confused, where can I find—if not “answers” to the great mysteries of life—at least some clarification or guidance?*

— *Where will I start my search for that wisdom? (Help may be only a text, a phone call, or an online search away.)*

HINT: Take advantage of adult education opportunities offered in our weekly “Staying Connected” newsletters. Also, YouTube is loaded with sound Catholic teachings, like those of Bishop Robert Barron and JohnMichael Talbert, on nearly every aspect of Scripture and theology. It’s been said that the greatest sin is to do *nothing!*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (25: 14-30)

Note: Before reading the “parable of the talents,” listen to [Bishop Robert Barron’s](#) unusual take on its meaning and application to a believer’s life. Then, ask God for the grace to read the text for yourself, with new ears and a new heart.

Now read the parable slowly.

Jesus told this parable:

“Imagine someone who, before going abroad, summoned his servants to entrust his property to them. He gave five talents of silver [*50 pounds per talent, says Bishop Barron*] to one servant, two talents to another servant, and one talent to a third, to each, according to his ability; and he went away.

“He who received five talents went at once to do business with the talents and gained another five.

“The one who received two talents did the same and gained another two.

“But the one who received one talent dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

“After a long time, the master of those servants returned and asked for a reckoning. The one who had received five talents came with another five talents, saying, ‘Lord, you entrusted me with five talents, but see, I have gained five more.’

“The master answered, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in a few things, I will entrust you in charge of many things. Come and share the joy of your master.’

“Then the one who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you entrusted me with two talents; with them I have gained two more.’

“The master said, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful in little things, I will entrust you in charge of many things. Come and share the joy of your master.’

“Finally, the one who had received one talent came and said, ‘Master, I know that you are a hard man. You reap what you have not sown and gather what you have not scattered. I was afraid, so I hid your money in the ground. Here, take what is yours!’

“But his master replied, ‘Wicked and worthless servant, you know that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered. You should have deposited my money in the bank and given it back to me with interest on my return. Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten.

“For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who are unproductive, even what they have will be taken from them. As for that useless servant, throw him out into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Personal Reflection

Bishop Barron states that a silver talent (equivalent to 50 lbs.) is metaphor for “God’s abundant mercy.”

— *Do I agree with Bishop Barron that the talents are metaphors for divine mercy? If not “divine mercy,” how do I translate the meaning of the parable of the talents?*

— *What do I think of Barron’s comparison between this parable and the parable of the loving father in [Luke 15:11-32](#), who actually lost two sons—the younger who took his share of the father’s estate (mercy) and squandered it . . . and the older brother who squandered the father’s mercy by nursing bitterness and resentment toward both his father and brother?*

— *Where do I find myself in this week’s parable of the talents and the story of the two prodigal sons? What new insights have I gained from my reflection?*

Shelter-in-Place

We are now wading through the aftermath of Election Day (and week!). In fact, one candidate still claims one side stole the election from him!

— *Am I one of those feeling disappointed with the outcome of the presidential election?*

Or am I celebrating the declared outcome?

— *How sure am I that my voting decisions truly represented what Jesus wanted me to do? How can I verify that my votes aligned me on the side of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?*

Do I have any regrets about any of my voting decisions? If I do, what are they?

Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend's liturgical readings?

Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on this weekend's scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and "give back"—during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Reading

Videos:

Listen to [JohnMichael Talbot's](#) 3 min. teaching on the [Parable of the Talents](#).
How does it match or differ from Bishop Barron's teaching?

Preview of Next Session

Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Ezekiel 34: 11-12, 15-17 "The lost I will seek out . . . the strayed . . . the injured . . . the sick. . . ."

Psalm 23: 1-6 "The Lord is my shepherd. . . ."

First Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28 "Christ has been raised from the dead. . . ."

Matthew 25: 31-46 The Last Judgment—"Come blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Post-Election Prayer

A prayer by [Cardinal Adam Maida](#), retired Archbishop of Detroit.

We lift up our duly elected leaders and public servants,
those who will serve us as president, legislators, and judges.
Heal us, O Lord, from our differences and unite us
with a common purpose, dedication, and commitment
to achieve liberty and justice for all people in the years ahead,
especially those who are the most vulnerable in our midst.
Amen.

Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, revised edition (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

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