Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What Do I See?

"When one finds a worthy wife…." Proverbs 31: 10ff
Study this image closely. Look for small details that highlight the "worthy wife" theme of this week's readings from Proverbs and Psalm 128.
What do I see in this photo that speaks to me of faithful love and care? What small details contribute to my assessment of this couple?

Image by Bennett Tobias on unsplash.com

Opening Thought

Cherish

'I love you'
and its evil twin...
'Luv ya.'
How they flow across the tongue...
glib but tired half-true habits...
drones in need of overhaul...
soundless noise...
unmeant...
unheard...
invalid password
instinct-blocked from other's heart.
What eager understudy waits in wings of romance—
love's more genuine self?
What if? What if instead I said, "I *cherish* you."
Ahh, 'cherish'...

to hold another dear...
take care of...
protect... foster... all-in...
naught in safe reserve...
Cupid's sharpest arrow...
costing the lover
delighting the beloved.
'Cherish'—
now there's love's worthy sub.

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Scripture Readings

Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 "When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls."
Psalm 128: 1-5 "Blessed are you who fear the Lord, who walk in (Yahweh's) ways."
First Thessalonians 5: 1-6 "Let us not sleep as the rest do but let us walk in (the Lord's) ways."
Matthew 25: 14-30 "A man going on a journey called his slaves and entrusted his possessions to them."

Introduction to the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

We're entering the final days of Ordinary Time in this year's liturgical cycle. Next weekend, we look forward to celebrating the Feast of Christ the King (our own parish feast day). The following week, a new liturgical year (Cycle B) begins with the First Week of Advent.

A major 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, that closeness 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 ("When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls") and Psalm 128 ("Your wife, like a vine, will bear fruit in your home; your children, like olive shoots, will stand around your table").

Chapters 10–31 of the Book of Proverbs (including this weekend's passage) actually date from centuries before Chapters 1-9 were added around the fourth century BC/BCE). The poem we reflect on this week contains Proverbs' final words. 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.

In Israel at that time, women managed the household, worked the orchards, and guided their children's steady growth to maturity. Typically, husbands spent their days with other men at the village gate, discussing the "important issues of the times."

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 reprises

Proverbs' theme in praise of women who care for their husbands, children, and homes—*and everything else*.

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

"A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds. Her husband trusts her without reserve and never has reason to regret it. Never spiteful, she treats him generously all her life long. She shops around for the best yarns and cottons and enjoys knitting and sewing....

"She senses the worth of her work, is in no hurry to call it quits for the day. She's skilled in the crafts of home and hearth, diligent in homemaking....

"She makes her own clothing, and dresses in colorful linens and silks. Her husband is greatly respected when he deliberates with the city fathers. She designs gowns and sells them, brings the sweaters she knits to the dress shops. Her clothes are well-made and elegant, and she always faces tomorrow with a smile. When she speaks, she has something worthwhile to say, and she always says it kindly. She keeps an eye on everyone in her household and keeps them all busy and productive. Her children respect and bless her; her husband joins in with words of praise."

Personal Reflection

We do well to read this beautiful wisdom poem within the context of the time of its writing (ca. fourth century BC/BCE) and the social context of that time. Also keep in mind that the references are to *married* women.

— *How does it ring true for me today, living as I do in a world where women still struggle for recognition and equality in the home, the workplace, and society as a whole?*

Responsorial: Psalm 128 (1-6)

From their earliest times, the people of God suffered persecution.

Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

All you who fear God, how blessed you are!
how happily you walk on his smooth straight road!
You worked hard and deserve all you've got coming.
Enjoy the blessing! Soak in the goodness!
Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Your wife will bear children as a vine bears grapes,
your household lush as a vineyard,
the children around your table
as fresh and promising as young olive shoots.
Stand in awe of God's "Yes."
Oh, how he blesses the one who fears God!

Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Enjoy the good life in Jerusalem
every day of your life.
And enjoy your grandchildren.
Peace to Israel!
Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Personal Reflection

In Scripture, "fear of the Lord" does not mean terror but rather reverent awe, deep respect, and trusting obedience. This poem/song merits the same sort of introduction as the first reading from the Book of Proverbs. We do well to read this passage within the context of when the psalmist wrote it (5th Century BC/BCE). Consider the place of origin (Israel) and the post-Babylonian exile time in which the psalmist wrote. Also keep in mind that, like the reading from Proverbs 31, this psalm speaks of *married* women and their subordinate status in the home.

Today, we do well to honor women's broader role and value in our own changing world. And we do well to see these ancient writings applying equally to *all* valiant women, who live and love their way through life in *other than* marital life choices and in multiple roles in society.

Keeping in mind the varying status of women in diverse cultures across the planet:
— *How do I understand this psalm's praise of women in today's far different culture of multiple life and career choices, at least in our First World culture?*

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

"Friends, I don't think that I need to deal with the question of when all this is going to happen. You know as well as I do that the day of the Master's coming can't be posted on our calendars. He won't call ahead and make an appointment any more than a burglar would. About the time everybody's walking around complacently, congratulating each other—'We've sure got it made! Now we can take it easy!'—suddenly everything will fall apart. It's going to come as suddenly and inescapably as birth pangs to a pregnant woman. But friends, you're not in the dark, so how could you be taken off guard by any of this? You're sons of Light, daughters of Day. We live under wide open skies and know where we stand."

Personal Reflection

St. Paul needed to clarify and reinforce his original teaching on the Second Coming of Christ (the *Parousia*). Clearly, some in the Thessalonian community misinterpreted his teaching. He now counsels the community to stay "alert" and sober (meaning "calm" and "thoughtful"). Over twenty centuries later, we still need to take Paul's advice. The "end" for each of us will occur in God's good time, not ours.

— *If there still exist for me some areas of my own faith about which I am puzzled/ confused, where or to whom do I go to find—if not definitive answers to the great mysteries of life—at least some clarification or guidance? Why that source or person?*

The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Short Version...25: 14-15, 19-21, 24-29)

"It's also like a man going off on an extended trip. He called his servants together and delegated responsibilities. To one he gave five thousand dollars, to another two thousand, to a third one thousand, depending on their abilities....

"After a long absence, the master of those three servants came back and settled up with them. The one given five thousand dollars showed him how he had doubled his investment. His master commended him. 'Good work! You did your job well. From now on be my partner'....

"'The servant given one thousand dollars said, 'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways. You demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent.'

"'The master was furious. That's a terrible way to live! It's criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do *less* than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

"'Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most.'"

Personal Reflection

Sr. Mary McGlone, CSJ once wrote in the *National Catholic Reporter*, "The owner was not only wealthy, he was extravagant in his trust!" An overlooked aspect of this parable is the wealthy man's *expectation* that his money's caretakers would *invest* in financial endeavors with no guarantee of gain, let alone doubling their allotted principal.

The first two servants followed their master's example in adding to his fortune. They speculated in the market of the time despite the possibility of failure! This should give us a better understanding of the third recipient's fatal error. His cowardice led him to make no attempt at all to put his master's funds at risk. That's why he was punished.

— *Where do I find myself in this parable? What new insight have I gained from my reflection?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening, and Reading

Watch

A dramatization of the "Parable of the Talents" produced by the Church of Latter Day Saints (3 min.).

Listen
Just because… listen to this angelic rendition of Pie Jesu by 13-year old Malakai Bayoh of London (2023)

Read
The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World by Melinda Gates
"Melinda Gates' book is a lesson in listening. A powerful, poignant, humble, and humbling call to arms."—Tara Westover, author of the bestseller, *Educated*
(Note: I read this book and found it both an eye-opening and inspiring reminder that change is not only possible but achievable.—AJG)

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
Ezekiel 34: 11-12, 15-17 "God, the Master, says: 'From now on, *I myself* am the shepherd.'"
Psalm 23: 1-6 "I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life."
First Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28 "Everybody dies in Adam; everybody comes alive in Christ."
Matthew 25: 31-46 The Last Judgment—"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father!'"

Closing Prayer

A Prayer for Every Woman
Loving Father,
I pray for every woman...
in every corner of the world…
in every walk of life.
You wonderfully created each one...
and I thank you for their unique gifts... talents... and qualities.
Bless every woman with a deep sense of worth and identity.
May she know she is cherished… valued… and loved.
Grant her peace and remind her of your unfailing love.
Help her to find solace in your presence…
and to lean on you for strength in difficult times.
May every woman know the power of her voice...
the impact of her actions... and the influence she holds.
Equip her to be a beacon of light… spreading love…
kindness… and compassion... wherever she goes.
Use her to make a difference in others' lives…
and the world around her.
In your empowering name, we pray.
Amen.

Source: This prayer seems to be no longer available online

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.
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