First reading proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31

'She works with willing hands.'
An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Responsorial Psalm 128(127): 1-5 R1

Blessed are all who fear the Lord.
Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
and walk in his ways!
By the labour of your hands you shall eat.
You will be blessed and prosper.

Your wife like a fruitful vine
in the heart of your house;
your children like shoots of the olive
around your table.

Indeed thus shall be blessed
the husband who fears the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from Sion.
May you see Jerusalem prosper
all the days of your life!

Second reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

'Do not let the day of the Lord surprise you like a thief.'
Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers and sisters, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Gospel Acclamation John 15: 4, 5

Alleluia, alleluia. Abide in me, and I in you, says the Lord. Whoever abides in me bears much fruit.
Alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 25:14-30

'You have been faithful over a little, enter into the joy of your master.'
At that time: Jesus told his disciples this parable, 'The kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

'Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, "Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours." But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." '

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Feast days this week
Monday16th November: St Margaret of Scotland, St Edmund of Abgdon
Tuesday 17th November: St Hilda of Whitby, St Hugh of Lincoln
Wednesday 18th November: Dedication of the Basilicas of Sts Peter and Paul
Saturday 21st November: The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Cycle of Prayer

All Victims of War

Prayer

O God, merciful and strong,
who crush wars and cast down the proud,
be pleased to banish violence swiftly from our midst
and to wipe away all tears,
so that we may all truly deserve to be called your children..

Roman Missal

In proportion to one's ability

We know from experience that different people have different abilities. A person with an ability to listen to others may not have the ability to be a good administrator. Someone who is well able to mend a leak or fix a washing machine may have little or no musical ability. An effective teacher may be a hopeless mechanic. We learn from experience whose good at what, and we relate to people accordingly. We tend to entrust people with tasks that are in proportion to their ability. We also learn from experience what our own abilities are, and what our limitations are, and we tend to take on tasks that correspond to our abilities and avoid tasks that do not.

The rich man in today's parable was well aware of the abilities of his servants. Before he set out on his journey he entrusted his property "to each in proportion to his ability." He knew what each of his three servants was able for, and he only gave as much responsibility to each of them as each could carry. The man who received five talents of money was capable of making five more; the one who received two talents was capable of making two more; the one who received one talent was capable of making one more. The first two servants worked according to their ability. The third servant did not, giving his master back the one talent he had been given, instead of the two talents he was capable of gaining. What held this servant back from working according to his ability was fear. "I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground."

Many of us may find ourselves having some sympathy for the third servant, because, deep down, we are only too well aware how fear can hold us back and prevent us from doing what we are well capable of doing. Fear can be a much more powerful force in the lives of some than others. There can be many reasons for this. Those who have experienced a lot of criticism growing up can be slow to take a risk and may develop a fearful approach to life. We are familiar with the Irish proverb, Mol an oige agus tiochfaid siad. Praise the young and they will make progress. The converse can also true. Criticize the young and they will be held back. Unfair criticism can stunt our growth and prevent us from reaching our God-given potential. We hide what we have been given in the ground. There it remains safe, but useless.

Jesus was only too well aware of the disabling power of fear in people's lives. It is striking the number of times in the gospels he addresses people with the words, "Do not be afraid." When Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man," Jesus replied to him, "Do not be afraid, from now on it is people you will catch." When fear threatened to hold Peter back, Jesus called him forward into a new way of life. Jesus was present to people in ways that released them from their fear. In particular, he did not want fear of failure to hold people back. He could cope with failure in others. He knew that many people could learn from failure. There was little to be learned from staying put. There was much to be learnt from striking out, even if failure was experienced along the way.

The tragedy of the third servant in the parable today is that, out of fear, he hid what had been entrusted to him, even though he had the ability to use it well. We have each been graced in some way by the Lord for the service of others. If I hide what the Lord has given me, others are thereby deprived. Most of us need a bit of encouragement to place our gifts at the disposal of others. Part of our baptismal calling is to give others courage, to encourage others. A couple of verses beyond where today's second reading ends, Paul writes: "Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing." In these difficult times for the church, the ministry of encouragement is all the more necessary. There is much to be learned from the mistakes of the past, but the Lord would not want us to go to ground. Now is not the time to hide our Good News in the ground out of fear. Rather, it is a time to encourage each other to share this treasure so that the church may become all that God is calling it to be.