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God Discerns Definition of Success in Life

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God Discerns Definition of Success in Life

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Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for November 13, 2011 for Cycle A:

Prv 31:10-31; Ps 128; 1 Th 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30

GOD DISCERNs DEFINITION OF SUCCESS IN LIFE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

One of the perennial models for a humorous assessment of married life in this country is "Blondie," the wife who succeeds to make her incompetent husband look good in the various situations in which he finds himself. Indeed, an important aspect of marital bliss is the support that each partner should offer to the other. However, it would be tragic if the self-effacing, patient efforts of the wife were not appreciated by her husband. Just as important would be his commitment to reciprocate in areas where *his* talents should shine.

How many husbands today take the time to show loving appreciation to their spouses in elegant poetry, or even heartwarming prose? The last part of the Book of Proverbs (31:10-31) constitutes a paean of praise to the good wife. Each verse begins with the succeeding letter of the alphabet, a disciplined effort to show the intention to be comprehensive in extolling the virtues of this woman. Did the poet compose this piece to honor his wife as a personal tribute? Did he perhaps sing it to her in the presence of their children? Whatever the circumstances of its origin, the poem (or parts of it) have been used for centuries by the man who recognizes how ideal his wife is for him.

This poem portrays the many-faceted competence of the ideal homemaker. Every aspect of household economics came under her purview. Her husband trusted her decisions implicitly and her industry enabled him to devote himself to civic affairs (Prv 31:23). Of course, one hopes that he also took *his* domestic and parental duties seriously! Along with the Song of Solomon (the Canticle), this poem describes marriage as a partnership of equals. The woman is also described in the creation hymn (Gn 1:1-2:4) as the equal of her husband in the twofold vocation of cooperating with God in raising a family and exercising stewardship over the earth (1:26-28).

In "the parable of the talents", Jesus stressed the doctrine that, created in the divine image and likeness, each person must accept *and* use the divine gifts unique to his or her situation. There should not be any comparison between individuals, because only God can discern what is true success in life. Only God knows both the gifts and burdens of each person. Therefore, the commendation and reward are the same in each case. "Well done! You are an industrious and reliable servant...Come, share your Master's joy!"

The third servant buried the gift entrusted to him because he feared that he would never be able to please his Master. He was condemned for his failure to make an effort to cooperate with God. An essential aspect of his education was wanting. The doctrine that each person is created in the divine image should be the basis for a healthy self-esteem. In a totalitarian, tightly structured system of government people may develop the attitude that by doing little and never taking any initiative they will keep out of trouble. That attitude has no place in the Christian life.

This parable, with its theme of divine judgment, is very appropriate for the month of November and the end of the Church's year. St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in order to exhort them to live each day as preparation for our cooperation in the great purpose of God's plan for creation. The time when God brings history to its consummation is not to be revealed, nor should we try to calculate its arrival (see Mk 13:32; Acts 1:7). The task of each person is to live so that death will not catch him or her unawares. We have been enlightened by the virtue of faith and graced by many gifts of the natural and supernatural orders. Our task is to pray constantly for the alertness necessary to live so that we will be worthy of the Lord's call: "Come, share your Master's joy."