**1 November | All Saints Day | Matthew 5:1-12a | The Beatitudes**

This passage begins the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus powerful in word, in Matthew’s great gospel of the teaching Jesus. The blessed ones are those who are neglected by the standards of the world – the poor, the despised, those of undivided heart, etc. The sermon is the ‘charter of the kingdom’, the ‘law of dis¬cipleship.’ Jesus teaches ‘right behaviour’ based on all that God has first done for us. The glad tidings of the gospel demand a response.

The poor are the ‘*anawim*’, people who realize their own fragility and the fleeting deception of human support. They look to God as their only sure safety. The mourn¬ers weep for the sin in the world – and in their own lives! The truly meek are peaceable towards God and their neighbor. In the beatitudes, Jesus defines his own being and calls others to be what he is.

The mountain setting makes Jesus a Moses-like figure, the new authoritative teacher. Within these beatitudes we have echoes of Wisdom literature and prophets. Isaiah comforted a mourning Israel when its temple was destroyed. The women mourn the death of Jesus only to be comforted by his resurrection. Those who hunger and thirst for our right relationship with God, self, others, and all creation are blessed but warned to expect opposition.

**8 November | 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time | Matthew 25:1-13 | The bridegroom comes**

‘Wise and foolish’ are unusual characterisations in the parables of Jesus, but are characteristic of Matthew through the parables dealing with the crisis of choosing to believe or reject the Lord, a choice linked with the end of the world and the return of Christ in glory. It links with the next parable of the wise use of Talents. The first problem is the apparent point in 25:13: ‘Watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour.’ Yet all in the parable sleep; none are watching when the bridegroom comes.

The drama lies in the contrasting action of the two groups. “It may be too late” is directed at Jewish leaders who delay in responding to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom or reign of heaven. The now moment is critical. In Matthew’s view the end will be a time that discloses and separates the good and the bad in the community, good seed and bad seed, sheep and goats. Matthew summons his community to responsible discipleship in face of the delay of the return of Christ.

**15 November | 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | Matthew 25:14-30 | Parable of the Talents**

‘Talents’ represent a very large sum of money rather than a personal skill one might have. Yet the popular understanding does have its value; it is not enough merely to do one’s appointed tasks and come before God with things evened out. God requires initiative in doing good. The servant who returns his ‘thousand dollars’ has not taken any initiative; we might well remember Jesus’ words in the Sermon, ‘a city built on a hill cannot be hid’ (5:14). It is worth noting that the world of the parable is a Gentile one (keeping slaves and taking interest on a loan).

Jesus may have wanted to show our different capacities in relation to God’s gift of the kingdom or reign of God. Those who understand it as the pure gift of a boundlessly generous God – to be received as little children receive gifts from those who love them (19:14) – ready themselves for its full reception by living in full creative ways (being a 5 or 2 talent person). Those who are crippled by a restricted idea of God and the way God operates with human beings run the risk of missing out altogether (a 1!). The third slave badly misses out on the point of the generosity of the master. A limited and false image of God is a terribly crippling thing. Which is more productive to good living fear or love? Avoiding wrongdoing and giving back what one has received may be a basis for strict justice, but the God that Jesus reveals calls us to creative and adventurous living.

**22 November | Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King | Last Sunday in Ordinary Time | Matthew 25:31-46 | Parable of the Last Judgment - Sheep and the Goats**

This parable, unique to Matthew, sets the standard for the judgment of all the nations - our mercy to Christ found in the ones discriminated against in society. It is one of the defining texts of the Christian faith, a dramatic scene of the end, of the long-awaited sorting out of good and evil, weeds from wheat, good fish from bad fish. While Christ is presented as King and judge, he is also present in the parable as hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill, and in prison. This judgment scene comes after three parables about preparing for the coming of the Son of Man, that warn us about what to do to succeed in preparation. All humanity is involved. By what standard does anyone enter God’s kingdom? Good deeds done to strangers and needy people.

The Son of Man returns in triumph; all the nations are gathered by God. The metaphor of sheep and goats is used to describe the sorting out of good from bad. The shepherding image of pastoral leadership is again used. A mixed herd of sheep and goats was common in Middle Eastern herding; at the end of the day they were separated, as goats are more sensitive to cold than sheep; goats need shelter while sheep can pasture. Another interesting feature is that shepherds went ahead of their sheep and they followed. Goat-herders followed behind the goats which ran ahead, a sure recipe for trouble. Again a good learning point – let us keep our eyes on our Good Shepherd for the way we are to live and learn.

**29 November | 1st Sunday in Advent | Mark 13:33-37 | Stay Awake**

Mark’s Gospel accompanies us through the year. Today we are told bluntly to be on the watch for the Lord’s coming, like a soldier on guard duty. We cannot be caught asleep, unprepared, surprised by his return, for no one knows the exact time. The call is to live and act as if the last judgment was to occur at any moment and to live so that one will be judged positively. It was normal to expect a master’s return during daylight, since travel in the dark was difficult and dangerous. The master of this household could come at any time during the day or night. The duties of the servants/slaves have been pre-assigned; how well they have done these will be the issue on the master’s return. Sleeping servants prepares us for disciples sleeping in the garden. The passage is directed to four disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, but the last directive is addressed to all of Mark’s readers. “Watch!” is a key word in the Gethsemane account.

The disciples of Jesus have just asked Jesus “When will this (the destruction of the Temple) happen?” Jesus’ answer is that only God knows when the end of the world will come. Not knowing, one must always be on the watch. The reading opens the Advent season, the time we watch and prepare to celebrate the first coming of the Lord; yet we are called on to watch and be ready for the return of the Lord, his Second Coming.