Reflection for 15th November (Second Sunday before Advent)

Chapter 25 of St Matthew's Gospel contains three famous parables of Jesus: the ten bridesmaids, the talents, and the sheep and the goats. Do they have anything in common? Well, yes, in a way they do: they are all parables about the kingdom of God – they are stories about "life in God's house". And they all have a sort of clock ticking in the background, because in each of them the time is short – we get the feeling that we do not have all the time in the world.

So what does the parable of the talents say to us a week after Remembrance Sunday, and what does it say to our world in its struggle to be free from fear and violence? Well, one thought is that peace doesn't just happen – it has to be created and then it needs to be sustained. The same applies to justice, and to many other things that our world needs but fails to achieve. If that's the case, then the parable is not about financial investment – it's about apathy.

Apathy is a killer as much as the bomb and the gun. The story of the man who did nothing with his talent is not about being especially talented or gifted. It's about being engaged with life; it's about responding to the people you encounter each day – even if at the moment we only encounter them at a distance. The man who buried his talent in the ground didn't do anything wrong – he just didn't do anything!

The kingdom of God is about being engaged in the life of the world. It follows on from the nature of God as revealed in the Bible. God is not distant and aloof from the life of the world: he gets involved; he is active and engaged, he is always on the go – he does not slumber nor sleep, in the words of the psalmist. Therefore his children should also be alert, active and involved. Their lamps should be lit; they are to be the sheep and not the goats; the gift of life which they have is to be used imaginatively and creatively to transform this world into the kingdom of God. They visit the prisoner, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless; they notice the needs of people around them and respond to them.

That doesn't mean you have to be some kind of dynamo which never stops running. You can contribute to this active and engaged work of the kingdom by simply being mentally and spiritually aware, by offering a ministry of hope and encouragement. Even if we are not physically active, we can still make a huge contribution through sharpness of mind and compassion of heart, because we live our lives in the light of the presence of Jesus.

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