

REFLECTIVE SERVICE: FOR WORSHIP IN ISOLATION SECOND SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT

As we meet together in spirit through these words of praise, may we think of and pray for each other sharing this reflection.

We come from scattered lives to meet with God. Let us recognise God's presence with us now.

Keep a short silence, still your heart. You may like to light a candle

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with us today, as we offer ourselves to you. Hear our prayers for others and for ourselves and keep us in your care. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

In the light of Jesus, let us examine ourselves and confess our sins.

Keep a short silence. Confession:

Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.

Absolution:

May God have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit all our days. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday before Advent

Heavenly Father,

whose blessed Son was revealed

to destroy the works of the devil

and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:

grant that we, having this hope,

may purify ourselves even as he is pure;

that when he shall appear in power and great glory

we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;

where he is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

Read a passage from the Bible

Matthew 25.14-30

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two

talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Spend a few moments in silence thinking about the passage and ask God to speak to you through his scriptures

Reflection

We seem to have become obsessed by fame. I know this isn't new, but it does seem to have accelerated to epic proportions in my lifetime. As a child I remember listening to Desert Island Discs where someone who had developed renown in a particular field was interviewed and chose 8 records to while away the hours before rescue or Swiss Family Robinson syndrome kicked in.

What struck me then was the lifetime over which they had developed their skills. Now I know that part of this is that to an 8 year old *everyone* over 10 looks old, but it still seems to me that what was valued in this program was the dedication and application to a talent over an extremely long career and yet this is what seems to be regarded as unnecessary or undesirable now. We want *instant* fame, and fame for *anything* as distinct from prizing and working with what one has and the fame being secondary.

I suspect this was the failing in today's third servant who stuck the talent in the ground and went about his own business. He tries to blame the master, painting him as black hearted, tight fisted and greedy but the master's enthusiastic response and generous treatment of the first two

servants gives the lie to that particular concoction; not only does he reward them, but he draws them into closer celebratory fellowship with him. They have done precisely what the third servant distrusted, involved others. In their trading many others would have had the chance to benefit from the riches that the master had shared out.

And so it is with talents. They all come from the one good, generous Father. And they are for the good of many, not just the one. There is no gift without graft, and there is no ability without responsibility.

‘But Bridget’, I hear you mutter, ‘I don’t have any talents.’ Maybe not apparent to us, but the master gives the talents *according* to the servant’s abilities, therefore the servants have already *had to demonstrate* their willingness to serve with these simpler ready-to-hand things. If we are not ready to serve in the small things, we will hardly know what to do with a talent. Too often we look for the big flashy talent first instead of committing what we’ve already been granted back into God’s creative blessing. What the master does is *encourage* them further and we could all do with a little encouragement.

Before we go out on the week ahead let us commit all that we already are and have into his care and ask *him* for the guidance we need. Just as it was someone beyond themselves who spotted their potential and increased their gifts maybe we can be the someone who spots a gift in others and does the encouraging. Then we really may understand the joy of the master in seeing someone blossom into all they are intended to be.

Amen.

We affirm our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

We intercede for others in the quiet of our hearts.

Lord, meet us in the silence

And hear our prayer.

Silence for prayer is kept: Pray for yourself in your isolation, that you would know God is with you. Pray for others in their loneliness. Pray for our country. Pray for the world.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Silence is kept

O gracious and holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive you, diligence to seek you, patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you, and a life to proclaim you, through the power of the spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us bless the Lord

Thanks be to God.

“For God has said, ‘I will not leave you or forsake you’ so we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear’.” (*Hebrews 13:5-6*)

“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not be dismayed.” (*Deuteronomy 31:8*)

Please God, we can all meet together in church again, soon.