

# Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski

## 1st Sunday of Advent

### December 3, 2023

Happy New Year to all!

Today, we begin another liturgical year, a year in which the Gospel according to Mark will be featured throughout much of the year. As with any new year, it's appropriate to **look back** on the prior year and **look forward** to the upcoming year, particularly as we begin the season of Advent during which we anticipate, initially...the second coming of Jesus, and then the coming of the Christ Child at Christmas.

Looking back on the readings of the past month or so, you may remember:

- When Jesus told us the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins in which we were encouraged to "stay awake" for we "know neither the day nor the hour" when Jesus will return in glory, or
- When the apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord's return will sneak up on us "like a thief in the night;" we need to "stay alert and sober."

Well, today's Gospel, to open the Advent season, continues the theme of "**be prepared**" (that's for all you Boy Scouts out there!) with Jesus' admonition to "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come."

But how are we to be prepared, to be ready, for His coming, both His second coming and His coming at Christmas?

To illustrate, I will share with you my own parable:

There was once a man who fervently prayed to God every day to win the lottery. Finally, in frustration, he complained in his prayers saying "God, for over three years I've been praying to win the lottery. You told us to "ask and we shall receive." How come I never received after asking all these years?" Then he heard the voice of God say to him "My dear son, please do me a favor and buy a lottery ticket!"

This isn't a promotion for the lottery, but to use a lottery tag line: "You can't win, if you don't play!" In other words, you cannot expect results if you don't act, if you don't take a risk.

There are two kinds of people in our churches today: Risk-takers and caretakers. The problem with caretakers, illustrated by that want-to-be lottery winner, is that they might just show-up at Jesus' second coming with little to show for the lives that they've led.

Today's Gospel is Mark the evangelist's version of the **parable of the talents** which we heard just two weeks ago. The theme of both Gospel readings is that we should be alert and use our God-given talents to serve the kingdom of God here on earth by serving our brothers and sisters.

But some of us don't fully utilize our God-given talents. Because we don't see ourselves as possessing outstanding gifts and talents, we conclude that there's nothing that we can do. Do you know anyone who wouldn't be a reader, eucharistic minister or a sacristan because they don't think they would be any good? Do you know a young man who would like to spread the gospel but is afraid he doesn't know enough theology? When people end up doing nothing, they are simply allowing their talents to wither and die, to be buried in the ground.

We are judged by what we do with the talents we have received; **to whom much is given, much is required.**

All of us here today have received at least one talent. We have received the gift of faith. Our responsibility as men and women of faith is not just to preserve and "keep" the faith; we need to trade with it, to develop and grow that faith. We need to sell it to the men and women of our times. We need to promote

and add value to faith. This is an adventure that brings with it much risk and inconvenience. But, unless we do this, unless we become **risk-takers** and not just **caretakers**, we stand in danger of losing the faith. The way to preserve the faith, or any other God-given talent, is to put it to work and make it bear fruit. All around us, there are innumerable opportunities for us to put our talents to work within our Cathedral faith community, such as:

- Helping to serve the homeless at our Morning Glory Ministries,
- Becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, Reader, Cantor, Server or Sacristan,
- Helping to serve the monthly luncheon to our neighbors at the Cathedral Square Towers, OR
- Helping decorate the Cathedral for the liturgical seasons throughout the year, to name just a few.

By becoming risk-takers and using our talents in service to our faith community, we help to preserve and pass on that faith to those around us. But that can be hard work—physically, mentally and spiritually. In order to persevere in that mission, we need help—the help that only God can provide. Jesus provides that help by his physical presence among us through the Eucharist—the physical manifestation of his continuing presence among us. Through reception of the Eucharist, we are infused with the very body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord thereby giving us the strength to further the Kingdom of God here on earth.

When put to work in the service of the Kingdom of God and our brothers and sisters, **when you become a risk-taker**, your talents are ....**PRICELESS!**