Our readings today are a study in contrasts.\(^1\) On the one hand, we have the charming image and scene of the worthy wife in the first reading; it appeals to our bourgeois, worldly sensibilities of comfort and peace. If we updated this reading for today, the worthy wife might have an well-curated Pinterest and be a mommy-blogger – in any case, she would run a beautiful home, with all the children well-dressed, the husband happy, the pets watered and fed, and all the things clean and organized. She would provide beautiful entertainment to neighbors and friends and be respected by all. Who doesn’t want this sort of life on one level or another?

But our second reading speaks of the Lord’s return in startling terms – precisely at a time when people are enjoying the type of comfort and joy that surrounds the worthy wife. “When people are saying, ‘Peace and security’,“ St. Paul says, “then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” Well, perhaps we need not fear; not many are saying “peace and security” in 2020! Nonetheless, St. Paul’s prophecy of the Second Coming challenges the idea of that worldly sanctuary for which we often labor so hard. Indeed, the coming of God’s kingdom in this context is seen as a threat, not a blessing.

Our gospel bridges the gap between the apparent two extremes. The “talent” spoken of by Christ was, in the ancient world, a unit of measure for precious metals – often for silver. One talent in the Hebrew reckoning was about 757 pounds of silver; a hefty amount, which, at current market value, would be over $27,000 worth of silver. So the one who was given five talents to invest, today would have been given about $136,000. And he doubled the investment; like the worthy wife, he managed his affairs fruitfully and well. But it was not unto life in this world alone, for he had to give an account upon the master’s return.

In other words, the gifts that we have, that we can put to good use and make into so many wonderful things, are not for us to enjoy by ourselves, in our own little bubble. We could try to build up an earthly paradise without any reference to God – many, in fact, do. Rather, we are challenged to build on what he gives us, aware that we will render him an account. All our earthly industry and efforts should be ordered to our eternal life with him. This means using the gifts he has given with gratitude and truly enjoying them, knowing they are meant to point us beyond this world; knowing that this is not our lasting home.

Well, that’s all well and good, except that the bourgeois and idyllic existence of the worthy wife with the lovely home is not the reality of all, or even of most. We suspect that perhaps the Lord was not just writing to upper-middle-class Americans of the 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century… And that’s when we see the metaphors that are presented in these readings. What are the talents that God has given us, except the valuable gifts of his grace? At baptism we were given his own divine life, and if we cooperate with it, it bears great fruit, not only in building up our world, but also in ordering it to God’s eternal kingdom in heaven.

So that even if we do find it difficult to claim “peace and security” in a year like this one or in our particular socio-economic circumstances, yet we recognize that we still have a gift from God on which he expects a return. The life of grace is a rich life, available to all, even to those who do not have worldly comforts or security. Our souls are the temple of God; and, by cooperating with his gifts, they can become a dwelling for him of far greater beauty and grandeur that anything we can build with our worldly resources. Indeed, these readings challenge us to consider our stewardship of the life of grace and where our lives are truly headed.

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\(^1\) Much inspiration for this homily came from Aidan Nichols, OP, *Year of the Lord’s Favour*, vol. 3 (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2012), pp. 166-167.
Ask yourself: Is my life really ordered to heaven? Do I start the week with Sunday Mass, or with Monday work? Do I pray daily? Do I go to confession regularly? Do I share my material goods with others? Do I share my spiritual wealth – especially my wonderful Catholic faith? Do I invoke the Blessed Mother and the saints for my various needs? Do I strive to see my life and all that is in it through the lens of eternity, with a spiritual outlook – or am I weighted down by a worldly gaze? We all can improve in one area or many! But we are God’s handiwork! In this Holy Mass, we again ask him to help us be ready for his return.