

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5: 1–6

Paul continues his teaching regarding the end of time. In the verses we read last week, he spoke of those who have died before the coming of Christ at the end of time. In today's extract, Paul addresses those who may still be alive on that day. He had previously expressed his concern that people had become apathetic and stopped working (1 Thess. 4: 11).

'You will not be expecting us to write ...'

At the that time, the new Christians thought that the end of the world was imminent. The time that they referred to as the Day of the Lord was expected to happen very soon.

'... the worst suddenly happens ...'

Although Paul speaks of *'the worst'* suddenly happening, he stresses that Christians have nothing to worry about. He goes on to say in later verses that *'God never meant us to experience the Retribution, but to win salvation through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that, alive or dead, we should still be united to him (v. 9).*

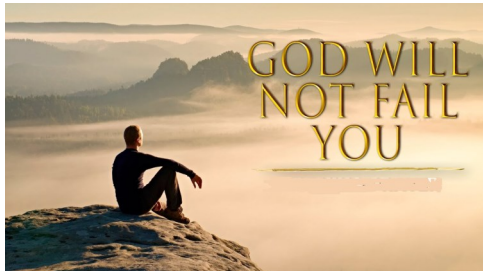
'... we should not go on sleeping ...'

Paul is not expecting the Thessalonians to literally go without sleep; he is warning them against the sleep of indifference.

'... like a thief in the night ...'

Paul's intention is not to frighten his audience when he describes the Lord as coming like a 'thief in the night', but to encourage them to be spiritually prepared for this time.

In Paul's closing prayer and farewell (vv. 23–28, not included here), Paul asks them to be blameless *'... for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ ... God has called you and he will not fail you'*.



Gospel Matthew 25: 14–30 The Parable of the Talents

This parable is the companion piece to last week's parable of the ten bridesmaids. Its purpose is to show the disciples how they are to live while they wait for the end of time and the return of Jesus.

I hid your talents in the ground

Rabbis of the time commended burial of money as a good way of protecting it. There was no inflation, so it was a prudent course of action.

A question of fear and trust

A possible reading of this parable could focus on questions of fear and trust. The first and second



servants are rewarded not so much for what they have done, but for their absolute trust in their master. Investing money always involves a risk which they were prepared to take. The third servant, on the other hand, is full of fear and seeks to keep the little he has at all cost.

'I had heard you were a hard man'

One of the reasons for his fear comes from his opinion of the Master, whom he sees as a harsh, calculating judge. However, in the parable, Matthew shows that living a life of anxiety and fear, rather than trust and love, has a paralysing effect and leads to losing everything.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth

This is a favourite expression of Matthew, which he uses several times to allude to the torments of hell. Many find these harsh words not in keeping with an all-merciful God. One possible explanation might be the desire to jolt people into reflecting on their own values by showing extreme situations and their consequences.

A talent

This is an enormous sum of money. One talent is equivalent to 6,000 denarii, and one denarius is a day's wage for a servant. In Matthew's time, the word talent was used strictly as a unit for volume or money. It had no link with ability.