Reflection for the Thirty Third Sunday of the Church's Year.

St Matthew wrote the longest of the four gospels and almost a third of it is set in Holy Week. In addition to the disputes he had with the authorities, Jesus taught his own disciples at great length during those days. At one point he poses the question, *"Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time?"* and he answers it with three parables which he tells back-to-back and which are our Sunday gospels at this time. Last Sunday we listened to the parable *"of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise."* The wise go prepared with extra oil and so are found waiting at their duties when the bridegroom arrives. The foolish do not. Today we hear the parable of the servants entrusted with their master's property while he goes on a journey. Two of those servants prove to be *"good and faithful"* putting their monies into good investments while one of them proves to be *"wicked and slothful"* hiding the money away. And next Sunday we will hear the parable of the Son of Man *"coming in his glory"* to *"separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."* Those on his right are invited to *"inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world"* and those on his left are banished *"into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* They are separated according to whether or not they have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked or visited the sick and those in prison. Whether or not they have recognised Jesus in *"the least of these my brothers and sisters."* All three parables provide a contrast between those who are "*faithful and wise"* and *"whom the master can set over his household"* and those who are not.

Days before his death Jesus gives his disciples the key to how they are to continue his work and it is rooted in commitment, dedication and attentiveness. "*The faithful and wise servant whom his master will set over his household"* is the one who is prepared like the wise virgins of last Sunday's gospel. *"The faithful and wise servant whom his master will set over his household"* is the one who is *"good and faithful"* in the use of the talents entrusted to him or her as illustrated in today's gospel. *"The faithful and wise servant whom his master will set over his household"* is the one who reaches out in practical ways and with genuine love to Jesus himself present *"in the least of his brothers and sisters"* as we will hear in next Sunday's parable of the sheep and the goats.

In these three parables Jesus presents two paths. One of which leads to sharing in the master's happiness, to entering with the bridegroom into the wedding feast, to inheriting *"the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* The other path leads to being disowned, to being *"cast into the outer darkness"* and sent away *"into eternal punishment."* That stark choice is presented squarely to the disciples in these three gospel parables and to ourselves as we listen to them over these three Sundays.