

33rd Sunday

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11-08

If any of you know how to double five talents--five thousand dollars--"immediately," please speak to me after Mass. We've got a few bills to pay and a church to build.

It's easy to hear these scriptures telling us to try harder: work longer hours, be more successful, get better grades in school. "Use your talents! You can do better than that!" Women might resent the "worthy wife" in the Book of Proverbs: she runs a spotless house, has terrific kids, is doing well at the office, always looks good. [Until 2005 I lived in an apartment building, and I remember hearing vacuums running at midnight. They were the single moms.]

But in Wilmington, 7000 DHL employees have learned that they are going to lose their jobs. Was it because they did not work hard? Some of our parish members have been laid off--through no fault of their own. One school parent who owns a small business wrote me to explain why they are behind in tuition: "this is so humiliating for me to have to say this; I am so ashamed that I cannot pay. But I will--a little each month."

It is so hard when you are trying your very best, working as hard as you can, and it still doesn't seem to be enough. I experienced that in the weeks before the election--in preparing homilies, trying very hard to adhere to the teachings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and to the mandates of our own archdiocese.

The parish has been struggling for 40 years to build a new

church--trying so hard. A group of us will very soon be visiting the Archdiocese to say: we can't do this on our own. The Archdiocese has to decide how important St. Bernadette Parish is--because we need some help.

Sometimes, you try so hard--as a wife perhaps, as a wage earner, as a father, as a student, as a priest, as a parish--and it just doesn't seem to be enough. [pause]

Which is when we are finally ready for God. It is those who have reached their limit who are most open to Christ. When we have failed, when we have fallen short, when our own abilities are not enough--finally then we are humbled, finally ready for grace.

Thirteen of us just returned from a pilgrimage to Lourdes, Fatima, and other holy places. At the tiny town of Lourdes, Mary appeared to 14 year old, illiterate, very poor Bernadette in a shelter for pigs.

In the little town of Fatima in 1917, the Virgin appeared to three children, 7,8,10--again poor and uneducated.