

## The Parable of the Talents

33rd Sunday of OT - November 15, 2020 - Cycle A

I'm going to ask a question that they told us, when I was in the seminary, never to ask.

Does anyone remember the homily I gave 3 years ago?

I will give you a hint... "I will give you \$5.00 if you remember.

The gospel about the talents comes up only once every three years,  
and three years ago I gave each parishioner a copy of the gospel,  
a five dollar bill and a mission to multiple that money.

People took the mission to heart and we made back about 2.5 times the amount.

I am not going to do this again; however, I would like to focus on the line,  
"to each according to his abilities."

The man gave one slave five talents,

because he believed that slave could handle five talents,

he gave another slave two talents

because he believed that the slave could only handle two talents,

and he gave the third slave one talent

because he believed the slave could handle only one talent.

First a few footnotes.

One, we think of talent as a gift, but in ancient times a talent was a unit of money.

In ancient Israel a talent was 6000 denarii.

If you remember a denarii was the wage for one day's labour,

so a talent would be equivalent to about 20 years of work;

a considerable amount of money.

Second, although the parable is about a large sum of money,  
it would be equally true in regards to any type of talent.

Third, although the parables are rooted in real life, they always reflect an aspect of God.

So when the gospel says, "For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summed his slaves,  
and entrusted his property to them."

It is really talking about Jesus'. Who went on a journey...he ascended to his Father...  
and will come again in all his glory;

and how in the meantime he has entrusted to world to us.

But back to the line "to each according to his abilities."

In the parable, and in real life, Jesus has entrusted to us...a talent...

each according to his abilities.

Meaning he doesn't give us more than we can handle...and...since each one of us has an ability---  
he has given each one of us a gift.

True humility is asking yourself,

"What gift has God given to me...and how do you think he would like me to use it."

False humility is saying, "I am only a worm, and God would never entrust anything to me...  
I have no gifts."

Because if that is our attitude,  
in one fell swoop we have--not only negated the generosity of our God,  
but we have also absolved ourselves of any responsibility  
in building the Kingdom of God.

I have done that \$5.00 homily in eleven parishes  
and the first time I was going to do it, I was talking to, then Fr. Albert LeGatt, about my project.  
The first thing he said was, "You're taking quite a risk aren't you."  
He was referring to the fact I was going to give away about 2500 dollars.  
But he caught himself and immediately followed that up with...  
"but that is the same risk God takes with us."

In every parish that I did that project,  
there was a two or three fold increase on money that has come back.  
However, in each of those parishes there were some who "buried their treasure."  
And by that I mean, there were some who put the envelope—  
with the copy of the parable, the five dollar bill and the mission to multiply—  
on the fridge,  
and then five months later brought it back, in some cases still sealed in the envelope.  
Now I will admit that this was better than those who basically pocketed the money  
and never brought anything back to the church.

"To each according to their abilities"  
The question that we have to ask ourselves is, both 1) "What gift has God given to me,  
and 2) What am I going to do with that gift."  
Because the day will come when the master will return and settle accounts with each of us.  
When our response to him is, "You gave me a talent,  
but I didn't do anything to figure out what it was, nor did I do anything with it...  
well we will all be judged...  
not because we misused the gift we had been given,  
but because we did not use it at all.

It is no coincidence that this gospel is paired with the first reading from the book of Proverbs.  
"A capable wife who can find her?"  
She is an example of someone who does not bury the gifts and talents that she has been given.  
She uses all her gifts and talents to improve her lot in life  
and improve the lot of all those around her.  
"Who can find her?" Indeed someone like her is rare indeed.  
A clue to her strength comes in the line, "A women who fears the Lord is to be praised."

Fear of the Lord is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.  
When the prophet Isaiah speaks about the gifts of the Holy Spirit he says,  
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (Is 11:2)

However, when Isaiah refers to “Fear of the Lord.”

He does not mean being scared of the Lord--at least not in the strict sense.

True fear of the Lord is a little difficult to explain.

Imagine the relationship you have with your spouse, or good friend or a good family member.

In one sense you know there is a lot of love in that relationship,  
but you also know that it would not be hard for you to do something stupid  
that could destroy that relationship.

It is healthy to have a fear of doing something that could harm the relationship.

It is not because you are afraid of the other person,  
it is because you are afraid of doing something that would damage that relationship.

In the gospel the first two slaves had this healthy “Fear of the Lord.”

It is not that they were scared of the master.

Like the third slave they knew he was a harsh man, reaping where he did not sow,  
and gathering where he did not scatter seed.

They knew this, but they chose to focus on the fact he also loved them.

Loved them enough to entrust a great responsibility on them,  
and they were not going to do anything that would destroy that trust.

The third slave chose to focus on the harshness of the master.

And that focusing on his harshness paralyzed him. He was not able to do anything.

Had he focused on the love the master had for his slaves,  
he would have done anything not to damage that relationship of love.

But he didn't...which really means he had no love for the master.

The day will come when Jesus does return in all his glory. It is not enough that we wait patiently.

We have all been entrusted with talents--talents that really belong to our God.

As we wait, let us remember that elsewhere in the book of Proverbs it says, (Proverbs 9:10)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

Let us have a healthy fear of the Lord  
and strive not to do anything that will damage that relationship.