

In our gospel today we hear Jesus speak in a parable about a man going on a journey who entrusted his slaves with his property. To one he gave five talents, to another he gave two and to a third slave he gave one talent.



What does Jesus mean in this parable by a “talent”? In the biblical sense, it’s not the ability to carry a tune, paint a beautiful picture or tell intriguing stories. A talent is a measure of weight, specifically the typical weight of a soldier’s pack, something in the range of seventy to one hundred pounds. As it is used in this parable, it refers to the weight of the coins entrusted to three servants. The talents the master gave his servants made for them a heavy load of very valuable coins. The slaves were given much responsibility with the expectation they would do something with it.

For some unexplained reason, the master was going away for a long time. Wanting to leave the home front well cared for, he called in three of his most competent slaves and demonstrated his high esteem and trust of each of them. He wanted them to act in his stead, to represent him by administering his goods. They were given neither detailed instructions nor a supervisor. He put it all in their hands. Without explicitly stating so, the master wanted the servants to continue his work. If he had wanted the money banked or buried, he could easily have done that himself. Instead, by giving them such responsibility, he expected them to share in his mission and work.

Here we have a master who in fact was very rich. He hands over all his money and assets to three of his trusted servants, and, in case you didn’t notice, he doesn’t say anything to them about what they are supposed to do with it. He simply gives each of them a quantity commensurate with their ability. Then he leaves town.

We hear that the first servant “immediately” went to work and doubled the money. The second servant achieved the same result. But the third decided to avoid both risk and industry. What attitudes motivated their actions? Clearly, all three servants had seen the owner at work. They understood how he operated and what he had done to earn his wealth. The first and second servants emulated the master. They did what he did and achieved similar results, doubling the fortune while showing their attachment to his enterprise.

The third servant actually repudiated the master and his occupation by hiding the money and ignoring everything he had learned in his service. In the end, the master judged that to be the worst thing any servant could have done. By burying the money, he brought shame on the master; by doing nothing he actually made a scathing critique of the master's whole enterprise. Given the master's affluence, that insult was far worse than the loss of potential profit from one mere talent.

Upon his return, the master discovered not only how industrious his servants were, but also how they regarded him. The third servant lived in fear and regarded him as hard, leading him to have as little as possible to do with the master and his money. The first two servants didn't need to verbalize their opinion. Their imitation of him spoke for them. When the first two reported in with their profits, they were telling him, "I have learned much from you. You try to make everything you touch grow. By allowing me to share in your enterprise, you have also made me grow."

In the end, the attitudes of the servants led to their actions that made all the difference. While one clearly did not share his master's values, the other two took up the master's mission and were then thoroughly prepared to share his joy.

Placed in the Lectionary toward the end of the church year, this parable urges us to evaluate our own service, to consider our attachment to Christ's enterprise, our investment of God's gifts and our longing to have a share in Christ's own joy. Our demonstration of our service need not be as dramatic as the task of managing a wealthy man's estate, but it certainly needs to be sharing in our master's work.

Today's first reading from the book of Proverbs presents an ancient description of a model servant of God: the valiant woman who is a "worthy wife." In this passage, the conclusion of the book, we encounter a model we can imitate — a simple, honourable woman of industry and character. She is a woman who simply fulfills her human vocation, transforming nature's bounty into goods for both her family and the poor for whom she cares for as her own. Her life and her work speak for her, encouraging those who know her to follow her example.

In our second reading St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians encouraging them to be children of light, children of the day, and to keep awake and sober. His people are concerned — as we all are, if we admit it — about "the end," whether that be about death or the end of the world. So Paul writes to reorient their concerns.

One of the ways he does that is to make them think about the meaning of the time they have in life. They are asking questions about the "when" of Christ's return, and Paul wants them to think about what they and Christ want from the present moment. He tells them that their concern about dates, what he calls chronological time, is relatively unimportant. Nobody can know the time or the hour of things yet to come but the present moment well spent, is a precious gift from God.

The important thing is the quality of our time and how we spend it. The time we spend being conscious of, and enjoying God's presence. We experience quality time when the clock seems to stop as we spend time with family and friends or when a sunset captures us. It is times like these that we feel the presence of God's grace. Paul is telling his community that such time is the only thing about which they need to be concerned. It is that to which they must stay awake. Then, the "thief in the night" will be nothing more than a welcome surprise when we encounter the end.

Together our three readings today are perfect for the closing weeks of autumn and the end of the church year and they challenge us to understand our life in terms of its ultimate purpose. We have all been given talents and time. Let's not bury them or waste them. The readings remind us to live as children of God, sharing in his work. Let's not bury our talents but use them for the good of Christ and his Church.

In our bulletin this weekend there is an insert to invite you to share your gifts and talents for the benefit and growth of our parish community. Please read this insert carefully and pray about how you can share your gifts and talents that have been entrusted to you by the Divine Master.