

## 33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

*Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 + Psalm 128 + 1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 5: 1-6 + Matthew 25: 14-30*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: November 16, 2014

In his parables, Jesus always throws in at least one detail which surprises his listeners and catches them off guard.

This teaching tactic causes them to remember his teaching and ponder it.

That detail in today's parable is Jesus' use of a "talent."

A talent is a monetary unit equal to 15 years of wages or almost \$1 million.

The servant who receives 5 of his master's talents thus receives \$5 million.

Even the servant who receives only one talent receives an incredible amount.

Thus, the total trust of the Master in his servants is the true center of this parable.

In reality, the Master entrusts not only all of his possessions to his servants, but in doing so, he entrusts his very self to them.

The Master of the Universe, the God of heaven and earth, whispers daily in our ear:

*"Will you trust my trust in you?*

*Will you finally agree to derive hope and strength not directly from yourself—  
as if you could be the source of everything reliable—but from me working in you,  
from my fidelity to you?*

*Can you derive hope and strength from the beauty and goodness that my gaze of love  
has already stamped into your very being?*

*By accepting my love, you will have the power to love like me.*

*However, to love me truly, you must first trust my love for you."*

But, oh, the temptations with which we human beings wrestle, the voices that lead us away from God's voice of love for us, God's abiding trust in us. We listen to voices that lead us to believe that our own waywardness, that our selfishness, is greater than God's power to forgive, to heal, and to transform. We have to continue to return to God's perspective again and again, to how God sees us, to how God looks upon us and knows us intimately, even to gift us with talents according to our own unique abilities.

If we start and end only with our viewpoint on self, then we will remain mired in our own destructive fears and twisted expectations, burying not only our talents but our very lives, dying before we ever die.

The difference between the first two servants who enter into their eternal reward and the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant who is condemned to eternal isolation is their image of the Master.

The first two servants get it right---they see their Master as the giver of all gifts who rightly expects a return on gifts given.

They say to him when he returns: *"You gave me..."*

They understand that he is the source of all that they have, that everything belongs to him.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Servant has a different image of his Master, a false image, that is destructive and paralyzing.

When his Master asks for an account of how he has used his talents, he replies with:

*"I knew...I knew you were a demanding person...."*

I knew---with those two words, the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant states all that matters---

he has a clear, though mistaken idea of who his Master is, which paralyzes him.

For the other 2 servants, what is decisive beyond compare,

beyond any possible expectations on the master's part,

is the generous trust he has showed in them.

So they say to the Master, with gratitude: *"You gave me...."*

It is this demonstrable, trustworthy fact that the first 2 servants choose to make the operating principle of their lives.

The Master has trusted in them and that is good enough for them.

They see only his overflowing generosity which reveals the true nature of his heart and the invitation to grow, and therefore a call to a more abundant life.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant chooses to entrench himself in his own prejudices, against all palpable evidence---the very talent he is holding in his hand.

The certainty that one always knows better than any other,

even if that "other" happens to be the Lord and Master of the Universe,

makes for a radically different relationship between the 3<sup>rd</sup> Servant and his Master.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> servant suffers from a failure of imagination—he is stuck with an incorrect image of who the master is--he is unwilling to allow that image to be challenged or changed.

In the end, his distrust of his master's intentions causes him to bury not just his talent, but his whole life and person in the dark hole of sham security.

There are two types of fear in Sacred Scripture.

One is a life-giving, holy fear, such as the virtuous woman displays in Proverbs or the psalmist sings of: *“Blessed are those who fear the Lord.”*

This kind of fear is better translated as “awe and wonder.”

This kind of fear flows from humility, when we know who we are as creatures and who God is as Creator.

The other type of fear is an unhealthy fear, a death-dealing unholy kind of fear.

This is the kind of fear that paralyzes the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant.

This kind of fear, if we allow it, can reduce our lives to a mere vegetative existence.

The refusal to move forward, to grow, to love, is like spiritual suicide.

This kind of fear even disables the *“social sense”* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant.

Normally human beings allow themselves to learn from and be shaped by attitudes around them worthy of admiration.

The reasonable person allows himself to be persuaded

by the behavior of others when it obviously exhibits promising traits.

He also knows that life moves forward and not backward

and that personal growth occurs only when one engages life in the company of those others with whom one has chosen to throw one’s lot.

On this count, the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant chooses the way of isolation,

and he inevitably demonstrates the dead-end life of blind self-reliance.

The risk-taking, enterprising attitude of his 2 fellow servants ought to have been for him a stimulus to move into the unknown within his own area of responsibility, maximizing what he has been given.

But fear of failure, an extremely distorted fear of his generous master, pushed him instead into isolation, which leads to the frustration expressed by the image of what this 3<sup>rd</sup> servant will know for all eternity: *“wailing and grinding of teeth.”*

Sometimes we choose to embrace our fear as more real and more powerful than the goodness of God.

But as people of Faith, we can always choose to go deeper than the fears that stir up storms on the surface level of life.

We can go deeper into ourselves and tap that ever-present fountain of God’s presence at the very center of our being.

We do so with the encouragement of others, which is why being part of a community of faith is an essential requirement in taking the necessary risks of love to use the talents God has given us.

So that one day we may hear the words:

*“Well done, good and faithful servant. Come, share your Master’s joy.”*

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*