

Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, Nov. 15, 2020

Today we hear the familiar parable of the talents. This parable in Matthew's Gospel is the final words that Jesus will speak to the Apostles until he meets them again after the Resurrection.

When you hear the word “talent” what image comes to mind? You probably think of a clever or gifted person or athlete. We even speak of people who are talent scouts who find jobs for people of ability. But the word “talent” here does not mean this at all. When Jesus uses this word “talent” today He is not using it to mean a gifted or clever person but uses the word as it was used in his time. “Talent” was the name given to the weight of a **silver** or **gold bar**. Scholars tell us that the people in this parable are given an enormous amount of money because a “**talent**” was equal to 10 years of salary. So each person was given a vast amount of money depending on his abilities. (*Think of ten years of you own earnings.*)

We think we know this parable well. The man with the 5 talents makes 5 talents more, the man who receives 2 talents makes 2 more. In contrast to the first two talented persons the 1 talented person buries his talent as he tries to play it safe and ends up losing it all. I think this person had a tragic flaw as he lived in fear of losing the one talent he had and so doesn't dare to use it and ends up with nothing.

The first two talented persons are similar to the remarkable woman we read about in the **Book of Proverbs**, our first reading today. She is truly wise. She does everything well –she is a good wife and mother, a sharp businesswoman and generous to the poor. We hear the summary of her good talents: “*Charm is deceitful and beauty is fleeting. The one who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a reward for her labors and let her good works praise her at the city gates.*”

Let us return to the parable. How do we apply this parable to ourselves? We are now approaching the end of our liturgical year and begin Advent in two weeks and so the Church wants us to focus on our own gifts and talents. In this parable the master has given each person much and also given them a long time to develop and use these talents. When he returns he rewards them well and they share in the master's joy. God has also given to each of us a lot of gifts and talents. When God calls us home God will reward those who have used their talents well and earn the master's joy. Another point of this parable is that the merciful, gracious, compassionate and loving God is also the God who will judge us on the use of our gifts and talents. The moral of this story is the one who plays it safe is the loser of all! How about us? Do we use our gifts and talents well, like the woman of Proverbs?

Today our readings ask us to both look at the gifts God has given to each of us and how well we have used them. Remember we, too, want to be rewarded and filled with God's joy, don't we! Yes, This parable is a challenge to live our Christian faith as best we can.