

When Adrian, our grandson, comes over for a visit, he loves to play a game that we call “Find the Treasure”. We get out our little lego figures, complete with pick axes and shovels and we search around the house for buried treasure. It might be on the mountain of our living room sofa or in a cave under the coffee table in the family room.

And always after a successful discovery of treasure, Adrian makes a point of gathering it all up and he tells me that he's going to “Scotia Bank” to make a deposit. Yes, he knows at the tender age of three, about investing his treasure.

And this investment of treasure and talents is exactly what sacred scripture calls us to do today.

Of course the treasure we speak of could be monetary, but more important are the treasures which we have been born with, the talents given to us by God.

We are all unique and so our talents, our gifts are also unique.

We hear in today's parable, the recognition of a job well done doesn't go to the one who keeps his treasure safe and hidden, but rather to the one who takes risks in order to multiply the talents given.

This is the second week in our three-part series called Voyage Into Space and the discovery that we have more in common with space travel than we might realize.

Last Sunday we learned that, like astronauts preparing for a space mission, we too must prepare for our mission as disciples of Christ.

As Fr Mark pointed out, we must have a game plan that we utilize each and every day to prepare ourselves to fulfill our mission as disciples of Jesus.

This game plan must include elements of prayer and contemplation. We must spend time in prayer with Our Lord each day and listen to His voice in our lives if we ever hope to complete our mission, that call to discipleship. This is our training in preparedness.

But how do we accomplish our spiritual mission, especially now, in the face of isolation and uncertainty; in the face of insecurity and the unknown?

Today marks the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Poor. And with this present pandemic, they need us more than ever.

Here is an excerpt from Bishop Fabbro's pastoral letter for today:

“The theme chosen by Pope Francis , “Stretch out your hand to the poor” (Sirach 7:32), is meant to draw our attention to our brothers and sisters in need and to

encourage us to be generous in serving them. At the same time, the pope reminds us that we must address the structural causes of poverty, otherwise the cycle of poverty not only continues, it grows claiming more and more victims.”

He goes on to say:

“I encourage you to “stretch out your hand to the poor”, and I thank you for your support and your donations of time, treasure and talent which are enabling much good work to be done. May God bless us as we seek to live as disciples of Jesus.”

I encourage you to read the whole letter from our Bishop on our Diocesan website, www.dol.ca

We often speak about serving others as an act of Christian discipleship. But our present reality certainly hasn't made it easy to reach out to the needy. Pandemic, contagions, vulnerability, underlying health issues, isolation, fear of the

unknown; all these words have new meaning for us today.

I recently listened to a podcast interview with Scott Kelly who set a record for the longest space mission by a U.S. astronaut (1 year). He talked about some of those words, especially the isolation of space travel, the fear of the unknown and living with a certain level of insecurity.

And this is where his daily routine was helpful. His routine was something he focused on to take his mind off of these other things. The mere effort of “doing something” was a remedy for anxiety, that can often paralyze us into inaction

Part of our daily routine should be our mission of evangelization. This is a mission that cannot wait. In spite of what's going on around us, or rather because of what's going on around us, we need to act all the more urgently.

As we all know, this global pandemic has

exposed many needs that were hidden and ignored for far too long. Those who were so vulnerable before are even more vulnerable today. And many others who once lived comfortably are now among the needy. Where might our talents and treasures help these people?

Just as Scott Kelly had to focus on his objectives and his overall mission in space, so we must focus on ours. Just as his training made clear exactly what was expected of him, so too we must know what is expected of us. Today's gospel is a good reminder to us of what is expected.

In today's parable, Jesus portrays God as the rich master who entrusts his property to three of his slaves. This serves as a reminder to us that we will some day have to account for how we used our gifts and talents.

Do we use them to build up his kingdom? Do we use them to help relieve the suffering in our

world? Are we doing as the first two slaves did, multiplying the talents given to us?

Let us not be mistaken about our responsibility here. As one gospel commentator puts it:

“Money merely hoarded might just as well be thrown away. In the same way, what God has given us—our selves, our lives, our faith, our abilities, our gifts, our possessions—is given in order to be spent and put into circulation.

He expects returns from the loans he makes us. To try merely to preserve them is to lose them. In order even to keep his talent, the servant had to risk it...We all know that no one can really live by playing safe all the time.”

He goes on to explain that the success of the profitable slaves ensures them a share in the joy of their master. The parable teaches us that this is not because of their financial expertise but rather because the gifts and talents that they were given were used to bear fruit “in faith, hope, and charity. Whether we are millionaires or

paupers, it is upon this criterion that we will be judged.”

But we don't do this alone. God is always with us on our mission. St Paul understood this well. In 1 Corinthians, he states:

- “[God's] grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them; though it was not I , but the grace of God that is **with me**” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

And so we are called to step out of our comfort zones, to shake off our isolation that causes us to withdraw into ourselves and, with the help of God, to look where we can invest our talents for the good of others.

Just as Scott Kelly used the mission objectives on the ISS to keep him occupied and focused, so we can use our mission objectives of discipleship, charity and justice to keep us focused on what is really important.

Maybe this is the year that we spend wisely at Christmas. Mary and I are giving goats to needy

3rd world families on behalf of our children.

Maybe we can use our talents of compassion to comfort someone who is in desperate need of hope. Maybe it's time to challenge some of those institutional practices that continue to oppress the poor, the elderly and the vulnerable, especially the unborn.

Maybe it's time to look at the ministries here at Good Shepherd and decide to get involved. Visit our website at gslakeshore.com and discover how you can volunteer and be part of the solution. Working together in a spirit of collaboration helps us overcome our isolation.

Let us focus on the things we have control over and not sweat over the things we cannot control. Let us choose to respond in more positive ways to the challenges we face at this time.

Through prayer and reflection, I think we will discover that yes, it's time for us to revisit that

“Scotia Bank” of our gifts and talents and make a withdrawal in love and service to others.