

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jesus told his disciples this parable:

"A man going on a journey
called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.
To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one--
to each according to his ability.
Then he went away.
Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them,
and made another five.
Likewise, the one who received two made another two.
But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground
and buried his master's money.

"After a long time
the master of those servants came back
and settled accounts with them.
The one who had received five talents came forward
bringing the additional five.
He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents.
See, I have made five more.'
His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.
Since you were faithful in small matters,
I will give you great responsibilities.
Come, share your master's joy.'
Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said,
'Master, you gave me two talents.
See, I have made two more.'
His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.
Since you were faithful in small matters,
I will give you great responsibilities.
Come, share your master's joy.'
Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said,
'Master, I knew you were a demanding person,
harvesting where you did not plant
and gathering where you did not scatter;
so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground.
Here it is back.'
His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant!
So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant
and gather where I did not scatter?
Should you not then have put my money in the bank
so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?
Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.
For to everyone who has,
more will be given and he will grow rich;
but from the one who has not,
even what he has will be taken away.
And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside,
where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"

Mt 25:14-30

Talent is money. Quite literally, the talent in the parable that Jesus tells to his disciples is money. In his time, it was an equivalent of what a Roman legionnaire would earn during six months of service. But Jesus is not talking about money.

He is painting, for his disciples, a breath-taking image. His main character, “a man going on a journey,” is giving his servants big amounts of money and he trusts them to treat these talents as he would.

Like some sort of a mad twenty-something CEO from Silicon Valley, he gives to his people millions of dollars and expects them to join his madness. Let’s buy, sell, invest, invent. Let’s multiply the money as much as possible. Let’s buy the whole world!

His mind is revealed to us in the way he judges the outcomes. He wants his minions to multiply their value even more, and to those who bring income, he gives even bigger responsibilities. Let the madness never end.

He is even more emphatic when he’s disappointed. He is not just disappointed he’s angry and ruthless. The one thing that he seems to hate is the servant who is afraid to join him in his crazy business. He is truly angry and wounded when somebody does not use his money. What a strange story!

The last sentence hits us like a knife in the heart. “For everyone who has, more will be given, and he will grow rich. And from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” What are you saying, Jesus? Are you starting some sort of a church of prosperity, some crazy cult of money?

Jesus is not talking about money. Everyone who has ever worked in an actual business knows that you cannot grow forever. You will always hit the wall of incompetence, inefficiency, dishonesty, and basic human laziness. This party will be over one way or another.

Jesus knows that. So he wants us to ask ourselves: in what world is that image true? The answer comes to us unexpectedly, somewhere from the depth of the soul. It is shocking, like the last sentence from the parable: He is describing the world of love!

The man going on a journey is not a naïve youngster who just developed a new app, but God himself. God is never short of love and he never runs out of creativity. God throws his life around in huge amounts. He spreads around the abilities and talents and he expects us to use them. God is a neverending vortex of giving; the powerful solar wind of love that brings life and heals wounds. This story is the call to a breath-taking ride in the current of God’s love.

God’s call contains the great gift of freedom. As Saint Augustine puts it, “Love and do what you want.” Love with the fullness of your capabilities and even beyond them. Give yourself to God completely and generously in the wisest, deepest, most honest possible

way. Use your talents at the service of God and others, and you will never be lacking love.

Here comes the recipient of the one talent. He shows us how dangerous any mistake, any hesitation, any fear could be to us when we handle such huge treasures. How deadly are our incompetence, misunderstandings, and misdirection in the world of the enormous energies of God's giving. They all are the fruits of our selfishness, of our constant worry about ourselves. How paralyzing is the sin and even the fear of the possibility of sin. How paralyzing is the persistent awareness that we are still not loving the way God does.

This parable calls you to entrust yourself to the intuition of the One who created you. Allow Him to purify your unfaithfulness and imperfection. And start breathing deeper in the powerful and refreshing wind of God's mercy.