

## Fr Dispin John – Homily 33rd Sunday Ordinary Time 15/11/2020 St John's Mitcham

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I happened to go see a Facebook post of a priest, a friend of mine, just two days ago. This is how it goes. He writes:

" I need to vent. I experienced the worst customer service today". And within bracket, he writes: "I won't name the store because I am contemplating legal action." Then he continues: "Yesterday. I bought an item from this store with cash. And last night I found it did not work. So today, less than 24 hours later, I took this item back to the store and requested a refund. The sales assistant flatly refused, even though I still have the receipt. So I requested a replacement instead. Again, the sales assistant refused. I never do this, but I asked to speak to the manager and I explained to the store manager that I bought the item yesterday, discovered it didn't work last night. And now I wish to return it. The manager laughed in my face and said, 'You are out of luck, no refund, no exchange'. I tell you what, I will never buy a lottery ticket from this place again".

In today's gospel, we are introduced to a man who is called as master, who entrusts his property to the servants while he's abroad. He's an enterprising employer who hopes that his own flair of business would have rubbed off on the servants. He wasn't a hundred percent sure, but in a way he's a gambler. He gambles. He entrusts his money, it's a lot of money, to his servants. He doesn't instruct them what to do with the talents, with the big money. He trusts them to use their own initiative and imagination in this economic venture. As in all stories and jokes, our attention then turns to the third guy who believes that the safest way to handle this investment is to bury it in the ground.

The parable is aimed at the Pharisees, the religious authorities of his time, because the religious authorities, particularly the Pharisees, believed in preserving the law to the letter. You keep the law. And that is the only way to reach God. Any change here and there will be death knell. So you don't change it. You just preserve it and it'll take you to the kingdom. Jesus comes as an agent of change. Like the man with the one talent, the Pharisees want to bury it, safeguard it. So that it will not escape and return to God as it was. But Jesus tells us that they can be no religion without risk, no religion without adventure, no religion without change and enterprise. So willingness to dare and change is an essential part of our faith. Courage and change are essential parts of our faith journey. The parable also talks about different attitudes that we can have towards God. Like the first two who trusted in their master's ingenuity, in their business model. And they believed that because their master trusted them, they now have the courage to go and invest. They are not afraid.

But the third one is very interesting. He is afraid of his master. He says, I am afraid. So that was his foundation or his understanding of the master. "I am afraid". Why? He says you are a mean man, you, so instead of focusing on his own inability to advance, to progress, to change and to achieve, he is turning to the master and says, you are a mean man, you are a mean man. There is something similar happening in the book of Genesis. When Adam was found out, having breached the trust of God, the creator, Adam tells God, the woman you gave me, the woman you gave me, made me eat that fruit. So this has started a long time ago. Placing the blame on the other for our misfortunes. The woman you gave me made me do this. And in the gospel today, exactly the same thing: "You are a mean and exacting man, and so, afraid of you, I went and buried the talent". So the fearful attitude of this servant is displayed. Instead of rejoicing in his talent, like the other two, he organizes a very quiet funeral service. To lose nothing, he risks nothing and, not surprisingly, he gains nothing, too. Sometimes we need to question our own attitude towards God. Is my understanding and attitude towards God guided by my fear or my trust in God? Do I trust that God has blessed me with so many things and, therefore, even my challenges are an opportunity to advance? Or am I living in constant fear and bury myself and my talents conducting a quiet funeral service of me and my talents every day? Burying ..... burial service.

Do I spring with happiness because the Lord has trusted me. The Lord has entrusted me with such a huge responsibility of conducting my life with goodness, with gratitude and with all the talents that he has given me. I am now ready to take on the world. So no matter how terrible my circumstances are, I am going to advance my life because God has trusted me. So even we can say, okay, the circumstances of COVID, we understand this has had terrible effects on our lives. We can easily choose to use this as a burial service, as a funeral service for us. Or make this as a spring board to go beyond. This is an opportunity where we have learned about a few things, learned a few things about things. This is an opportunity where we have learned to trust in God with courage, not fear. The choice is ours just like the three servants in the gospel today. Is my life being guided by the light of trust that God has placed in me, or am I living in constant fear? But remember, fear is burial service. Trust is bright new life. I suppose, as people of faith, as people of God, as people of the resurrection, we are sure we will make the choice of trust in light, in the light of the resurrection.