

“The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2b). Alex was concerned there were a lot of break-ins in his neighborhood, so he decided to do something about it. He placed a key under the mat just in front of his door. If a robber finds the key, he will be excited for a moment until he finds out the key doesn’t work on the door. Alex is hoping the potential thief will think and reflect on what they are doing and perhaps choose a different path in life. Every so often, Alex checks underneath the mat and he has had to replace the key several times. We prepare for the thief at night, should we not also prepare for the day of the Lord?

In the Gospel, Jesus tells a parable of the master who returns after a long absence. He is pleased with the servant who was given five talents and returned ten. Likewise, he was pleased with the servant who was given two talents and returned four. However, the master was very upset with the servant who was given one talent and went and buried it. This last servant was not prepared for the day of the Lord.

In biblical times, a talent could be as heavy as 50 pounds. And 5 talents could have weighed 250 pounds or more. If we think of a large bar of gold, we can easily imagine something of great value that is quite heavy. Instead of thinking about the value of the talent only in terms of money, let us focus on the heaviness of the talents. What else is heavy?

Jesus’ listeners would have thought of the heaviness of God found in the Jerusalem Temple resting upon the mercy seat within the Holy of Holies. “Therefore, what was heaviest (most glorious, of most significance) of all was the mercy of God, which abided in infinite, inexhaustible abundance in the Holy Temple.”<sup>i</sup>

In Jesus’ parable, the master is God and the Lord is most happy when each servant multiplies the mercy of God. God is most disappointed when we fail to extend mercy to others. The servant who received forgiveness equivalent to one talent buried it instead of extending it to anyone else. “The divine mercy—received as a pure gift—is meant to be given to others as a pure gift.” We are reminded of this each time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ God’s love and mercy will grow in us as we forgive others. And we can also better understand the rebuke in the Gospel, if we don’t use the mercy of God that we have received in order to be merciful to others, then we will lose it.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, we see the abundance of God’s mercy as the father welcomes his wayward son home. But in the brother who holds a grudge when the fatted calf is killed, we see a man who has buried his talents. Despite mercy shown to him, he is unwilling to extend any to his prodigal brother. The loving father reaches out to this disgruntled son because he wants him to rejoice at his mercy rather than brood in anger. We must be on guard with our own resentments, letting them go rather than holding onto them.

We might liken this resentment to the ongoing saga with the election of 3 November. It is fairly clear that the results are accurate even as we await certification from various states, Alaska included. But there is a holding on to, an unwillingness to acknowledge defeat, a combative defiance that is a misuse of the talent entrusted to a person from one election to the next.

More significant than an election is the day of the Lord, the day of judgement. We prepare for it by being merciful to others. For example, on Veteran’s Day we celebrated the Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours, the Patron Saint of Soldiers. He was a Roman soldier in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. One day, he encountered a man who was freezing for lack of adequate clothing. Other soldiers in the unit payed no attention to the man. However, Martin stopped to render aid. He cut his own cloak in half with his sword and offered it to the beggar. That night, Jesus came to Martin in a dream wearing his cloak. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty

and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me” (Mt 25:35-36). The Lord judges us on our compassion and mercy for others.

As winter sets in, we must ask the question in our own community of how we might be more merciful to the homeless. In a non-Covid environment, they are able to find more sheltering space. But with social distancing and the concerns of the spread of the virus, they are more vulnerable than ever to the extreme temperatures of winter.

Alex is the man who left the key under the mat of his front door wanting to help the person who came to steal from him to think twice. To extend God’s mercy to others, we often need to be creative in how we can approach others. Insight comes from putting ourselves in the shoes of another and inviting God to help us see beyond the sometimes narrow viewpoint of our own thinking. “Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord. Whoever remains in me bears much fruit” (John 15:4a, 5b).

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<sup>i</sup> [wordonfire.org/resources/article/the-parable-of-the-talents/4482/](http://wordonfire.org/resources/article/the-parable-of-the-talents/4482/)