

33<sup>th</sup> Sunday- A Deacon Pat Hall

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; Matthew 25:14-30

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/111614.cfm>

How can I pass by the beautiful reading we had from Proverbs without comment?

This is revelation that we could just sit with...

and over and over, steep in its beauty and love.

I can't pass by this reading without reflecting that one of the things I did right in my life was to not let my wife, Jan, get away.

She has truly been a window for me to gaze upon Jesus Christ.

But of course, this Scripture isn't just about the wonders of matrimony.

It uses our understanding of the marriage relationship to lead us to the wonders of our relationship with God.

We, the people, are the "worthy wife with value beyond pearls".

We are the "unfailing prize" for our Father in Heaven, purchased and won through the Cross.

I'll use the word "purchased" to help segue into our reflection about the Parable of the Talents.

But first, we need to deal with some definitions.

A talent, from the Ancient Greek *talanton*, was a unit of weight of about 80 pounds and when used for money, it was the value of 80 pounds of silver.

As a unit of currency, it was worth about 6,000 denarii.<sup>i</sup>

Since a denarius was the usual payment for a day's labor, a talent was roughly the value of twenty years of work by an ordinary person.<sup>ii</sup>

By modern standards, at the median wage of just over \$25,000.00 per year, it would translate to half a million dollars.<sup>iii</sup>

So think of our servants in our parable being given charge of \$2,500,000, \$1,000,000 and \$500,000 respectively.

The exact amount isn't important,

but it should feel as extravagant to you as it did to the first hearers of this parable.

This parable is also the origin of the sense of the word "talent" meaning "gift or skill" as used in English and other languages.<sup>iv</sup>

So if I have musical **talent**, start thinking of me as having a half-mil of talent or better... or not!

Our parable today is our instruction (with a cautionary warning) about what we are to do with the talents we are given.

Many folks over the centuries have used this as practical advice about how finances should be managed.

This parable has been cited as grounding our attitudes about our free enterprise system.

The parable can be that, but of course it can be that and oh, so much more. Our parables are meant to take our earthly understanding and lead us to divine understanding.

Our *Catechism* says that Jesus invites us to enter his kingdom through the use of parables.

But he also asks for a radical choice:

to gain the kingdom, one must give everything.

Words are not enough; deeds are required. (CCC 546)

This is consistent with the challenge we heard from St. Paul today in his letter to the Thessalonians:

*Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do,  
but let us stay alert and sober.*

So what **have** we made of the talents we received?

Remember, these talents were not of our own making.

They are gifts from our Father.

Some are given superior intelligence, others strength of body.

Some are even given good looks;

not that any of us had a choice in the matter.

It could mean a blessing or a curse:

that's just a cross that Fr. David has to carry.

We also have the cautionary tale of the servant who buried his gift.

We are **not** to bury **our** gifts.

We are to take them into the transactions of human life.

We are to share them with each other.

There is nothing we've been given that we are not also called to share.

At this point, we are taking our understanding of this parable from our earthly experience to the spiritual.

If I spend my money, that shows up as a temporary deficit.  
It might experience a financial appreciation, but then might not.  
Still in the end, finance is a zero-sum game.

However, when we share the Spirit, in the Spirit,  
we can expect the results to double just as our first two servants discovered.<sup>v</sup>  
This doubling in the Spirit brings the blessings of the kingdom on earth and  
moves us toward our eternal destination.  
That, folks, is a return on investment with spiritual extravagance.

So what is your investment, how much?

Jesus withheld nothing from us, not even his own death on the cross,  
all for his love of us.

What does Jesus want of me? Nothing less than **all** of me.

As in our parable, some are given more to share, some less. Some get some of  
this and others receive some of that. Not one of us is given all the talents.

But you know what? Between **all** of us, receiving and sharing the gifts of the  
Father, through the Holy Spirit, as long as we all act as disciples of the Risen  
Christ, we have been given all we need to herald the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2002, ISBN 0-8028-6077-X, pp. 271-281.

<sup>ii</sup> At 6 days of paid work per week, and roughly 50 weeks per year, 6,000 paid days = 20 years.

<sup>iii</sup> The median U.S. wage in 2010 was just \$26,363 Washington Post by Suzy Khimm 10/20/2011

<sup>iv</sup> talent late 13c., "inclination, disposition, will, desire," from O.Fr. talent, from M.L. talenta, pl. of talentum "inclination, leaning, will, desire" (1098), in classical L. "balance, weight, sum of money," from Gk. talanton "balance, weight, sum," from PIE \*tel-, \*tol- "to bear, carry" (see extol). Originally an ancient unit of weight or money (varying greatly and attested in O.E. as talente), the M.L. and common Romanic sense developed from figurative use of the word in the sense of "money." Meaning "special natural ability, aptitude," developed mid-14c., from the parable of the talents in Matt. xxv:14-30. Related: Talented. *Online Etymological Dictionary*

<sup>v</sup> John Shea, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*, p. 321