

November 19 XXXIII Sunday in Ordinary Time

This penultimate Sunday of the liturgical year reminds us not only of the end of the liturgical year but also of the end of all things and of the preparations we need to make to reach Heaven. The main theme of the three readings is an invitation to live in such a way that we make the best use of the talents God has given us, so that at the hour of our death Our Lord will say: “Well done, my good and faithful servant!... Come and share the joy of your master” (Mt 25: 21).

The first reading suggests that we should be as diligent and industrious as a loyal and faithful wife, in the use of our God-given gifts and talents with “the fear of the Lord”. Unlike the one-talent man, she takes her gifts and “brings forth good, not evil”; she “reaches her hands to the poor and extends her arms to the needy”. In today’s Responsorial Psalm, Ps 128, the Psalmist echoes the concept of the blessedness of the faithful servant of the Lord. The Psalm affirms that the fear of the Lord is the key to human happiness and success. In the second reading, Paul advises us to keep awake and be sober, encouraging and building each other up as we wait for the “Day of the Lord”. He challenges the Thessalonians to turn fear of the Lord into positive, constructive and life-affirming action.

Today’s Gospel challenges us to ask the questions: Are we using our talents and gifts primarily to serve God? Are we doing everything we can to carry out God’s will? The parable of the talents challenges us to do something positive, constructive and life-affirming with our talents here and now. In reflecting on this passage, the parable of the talents, we are reminded of the responsibility entrusted to us by God. The master in the parable gives talents to his servants, and it is symbol of the varied gifts and the abilities that God bestows upon each of us.

Just as the servants are expected to use and multiply the talents they received, we are called to cultivate and share our God given gifts. The parable challenges us to embrace our unique abilities, whether they are talents, skills, or resources, and employ them for greater good.

It teaches us that a passive or fearful approach to our gifts is not in line with the purpose for which we have been given these talents. Instead we are encouraged to take risks, invest in others, and contribute to the well-being of our communities.

The third servant decided to avoid risk-taking and showed too much caution with money. His excuse was that, after all, he had not been given explicit orders about how to do his investing. Besides, any type of business is risky and the master might hold him accountable for any loss. He probably knew as well the long-standing rabbinic teaching that anyone who buries money that has been put into his care is no longer liable for its safety. Through this description of a lazy servant Jesus teaches us that there is no “safe” position in life. Christian living is a strenuous business involving occasional risk-taking. God expects us to use our every talent for personal growth, community service, and religious witness. Hence, this parable reminds us of the terrible punishments which lie in store for those who do not produce new spiritual wealth from the talents God has placed in their stewardship.

The parable also underscores the importance of accountability. God expects us to use our talents wisely and we will be called to give an account of how we have lived out our lives and utilized what we have been given.

1) We need to trust God enough to make use of the gifts and abilities we have been given. We may be especially talented in teaching children or cooking meals or repairing homes or programming computers. So, we should ask ourselves how we are using our particular gifts in the service of our Christian community and the wider society.

2) We need to make use of our talents in our parish. In addition to our homes and families, the best place to do this is in our parish. This means that we should be always willing to share our abilities in creative worship in the Church and in various ministries of our parish, such as Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, Home-bound Minister, lector, usher, Sunday school teacher, singer in the choir, volunteer, and member of one or more parish organizations and community outreach programs.

3) We need to “trade” with our talent of Christian Faith: All of us in the Church today have received at least one talent namely, the gift of Faith. Our responsibility is not just to preserve and “keep” the Faith, but to work with it. We need to promote and add value to Faith by living it out. The way to preserve the Faith, or any other talent that God has given us, is to put it to work and make it bear fruit.