

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME  
Year A: Prv 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Ps 128; 1 Thes 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-30  
November 15, 2020  
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The parable of the talents in the Gospel for this Sunday is another one of those passages from Scripture that makes many people think, “something doesn’t sound right.” The servant who received one talent knew that the money belonged to his master, and he decided to play it safe and not take any risks of losing it. So, he dug a hole in the ground and buried the talent for safe keeping, knowing he could then return it to the master without loss. But when he explained this to the master, the master replied, “*You wicked, lazy servant!*”, and then said, “*[T]hrow this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.*”

Sounds harsh, doesn’t it? The servant was trying to be cautious and safe. He was trying to be responsible. He didn’t want to take any risks, for fear of upsetting his master. And yet, the master still found fault with him, and reacted with anger. The parable doesn’t sound fair to many of us. It sounds like the master, who represents God, was cruel and unfair, and lacking in compassion.

So, what was Christ trying to teach us and the world with this parable? This is the main question we ask when we consider any passage of the Gospels or the teachings of Christ, especially when those teachings are confusing, or seem on the surface to contradict other passages of Scripture. Sometimes, we need to scratch the surface to discover the main point of the teaching.

In the parable, the servant tells the master that he buried the talent in the ground “*out of fear.*” He was afraid of the master, and his fear is what made him decide how to serve the master. But the master was not impressed and even considered this to be a fault. The lesson for us: God does not want us to serve Him out of fear. He wants us to serve Him out of love and even an eagerness to produce great results for Him.

Think about it: fear is selfish, because it focuses on possible consequences for ourselves. But love is *selfless*, because it focuses on the other person. When it comes to serving God, He does not want us to “play it safe” by minimizing the risk for ourselves. No, He wants us to *take* risks, in an effort to serve Him. That’s what the first two servants in the parable did, when they traded with the money that the master gave them. They took a risk that they might lose the money, but their

intention was to make more of it, so that they could give back even more to their master. They were eager and excited to serve him, possibly because they loved him more than they feared him.

So, what if the talents in the parable represent love? God gives each of us, according to our ability, the power and the desire to love Him and others. God does not want us to bury our love in the ground out of fear of Him, or fear of the consequences for ourselves from taking risks. No, He wants us to *use* that love to make a “profit of love,” so to speak.

If God gives each of us a limited time here on earth to do some good for Him, so that we can make a return to Him, what He cares about most is our attitude about serving Him – whether we do so out of fear or out of love. He cares about our intentions and our efforts, even more than the results. He loves a valiant effort that fails, even more than a cowardly and selfish effort that avoids risk. The reaction of the master in the parable seems to indicate that, even if the servants who made a profit had failed, the master would still have been impressed by their effort and their intention to please him.

So, when we think about our efforts to be faithful and religious, we should ask ourselves what our real motive is. Do we try to be faithful to God out of *fear* – fear of punishment and the consequences for ourselves? Or, do we try to be faithful because we *love* God, and we want to please Him? And, the parable challenges us to consider whether we love God enough to take risks to serve Him. One way to take such a risk is to love someone who doesn’t love us in return.

If the talents in the parable represent love, then we can better understand Christ’s summary of the teaching, when He said, “*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.*” In other words, to everyone who loves, more love will be given, and he will grow rich in love. But from the one who does *not* love, even what love he has will be lost. Our lives are an opportunity to love God by loving others. And love often requires taking risks, rather than fearing the consequences for ourselves. This is the lesson for us in the Gospel for this Sunday.