

We are blessed today to once again come together and celebrate the only thing that really matters: that our generous God is deeply in love with us.

Today's Scriptures pose a question for us to consider, not stated outright, but hinted at, for the present and as we continue our pilgrimage here on earth: **What am I afraid of?** This is an important question because what you and I fear becomes the obstacle to receiving the valuable gift God has for us. Not fully receiving this gift has eternal implications for us.

In the first reading, the description of "a worthy wife," we heard that the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. In the responsorial psalm, we all proclaimed: Blessed are those who fear the LORD. And in the Gospel, the third servant tells the master that "out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Fear in all three.

The gospel parable is filled with twists and irony. We first have to know a couple of things. People of this time had a notion of a fixed amount of wealth. Wealth and riches was a zero-sum game; there was only so much, from which each person received. The task of a peasant, and most people were peasants, was to satisfy the needs of the family, not to gather a storehouse of riches. We call this subsistence living. And the belief was that if I take more than I need from the limited wealth, I was depriving someone else of their share. For the Jewish people, greed was the greatest sin. We should also remember that a talent in this parable has nothing to do with one's skills or abilities – a talent is a form of currency, a very large amount of money, usually only the rich had talents. Each of these three servants or slaves was gifted with what today would be millions of dollars.

Matthew is using a bit of exaggeration to make a point.

Second, we should understand something about parables. Parables were mostly predictable; they had parts and a structure, and people could anticipate where a parable was going because of these conventions. The more appropriate, the more expected reading of today's parable would be one in which the slave who buried the money is the one who did the socially acceptable thing, burying the talent. Hebrew law declared that riches or property that had been turned over to the care of another and buried were safe and secure from theft – they were protected. So, according to the social conventions of the time, the law, and the expectations of a parable, readers and hearers of the parable would have expected the first two servants to be dressed down and thrown out because of greed, and the third servant to be commended and rewarded. Oops! Everything's upside down here! How can this be?

Matthew places this parable in a part of his gospel that looks at the end times. He's writing to a community that's having the same issues as the Thessalonians in the second reading: Jesus hasn't come back yet, as he promised. This delay was causing all kinds of doubt, despair, fear, and unhelpful behaviors. Some of the Thessalonians, believing the end times were coming soon, stopped working, stopped being fruitful and faithful members of the community and were sitting by, twiddling their thumbs. They expected others to take care of them, prompting Paul to tell them in another part of the letter, that if they didn't work, they shouldn't expect to eat.

In Matthew's community, some of the members weren't being faithful to the message and mission of Jesus because they thought it was too late, they must have somehow missed the second coming, or were passed by. This parable, turned on its head, was his message to do whatever is necessary to prepare for Jesus' return, because as Paul said, "the day of the LORD will come like a thief in the night."

We are the servants in the parable. The message is offered to each one of us. We have been given something very precious by one who has an abundance of riches. What is the great treasure which we're all given? The talent, the treasure, the gift we've received is the ability, the capacity to know and love God. It's an unlimited, infinite gift. It's the teaching of Jesus, the model of his life and ministry, the love of the Father he showed us in his coming down as one of us; it's the love he showed us on the cross. This gift, this love, is so valuable, no exaggeration, no earthly amount, could describe it. Jesus is the treasure given for our salvation.

We all have a different capacity to receive this precious gift, each one according to his or her ability. And every one of us has the capability to expand and stretch ourselves in order that our love reaches our full capacity.

We might ask ourselves what we've done with this treasure? How have we invested it? What return have we made of this gift, this presence of Jesus in each of us? Where does his presence go in and through us? And if it's not flowing through us in some way, we're back to the original question: **what are we afraid of?** You see, if we simply hold on to this gift, do nothing with it, bury it, we will lose it as surely as the third servant, who was left with nothing. The unique thing about the valuable treasure we've received, very different from earthly treasure, is that it can only grow when we give it away. Do we love the master enough to do what he did, to freely give away God's love? Our challenge is to follow the example of the worthy wife in the first reading. She is the summary of the entire book of Proverbs, she is the metaphor for how every faithful servant of the LORD should behave.

Today we have another example whose works, in the words of the first reading, are praised at the city gates. Today we celebrate with the Universal Church, the beatification of Wisconsin native, Bernard Francis Casey, better known by his Capuchin name, Solanus Casey. This is a big step in the process for his canonization. He earns the title "Blessed" – Blessed Solanus Casey, and the archdiocese of Detroit celebrates this honor, 60,000 strong in Detroit's Ford Field.

Blessed Solanus Casey personified the characteristics of "the worthy wife." He received the precious treasure and grew it by giving it away, touching the lives of countless people in his ministry in Detroit, in New York, in Indiana, and in Wisconsin. His kindness, gentleness, compassion, and persistence were consolation and encouragement to many, including his Capuchin brothers. He was described by the Capuchin minister general as "an extraordinary example of a true Capuchin, and a replica of St. Francis." While Solanus struggled with his studies, and was not an

intellectual giant, he grew his precious gift in the measure he received, and stretched himself to his capacity, unafraid to risk. He loved the master enough to do what each of us are asked to do, what each of us are challenged to be. Industrious Faithful servants!

Faithfulness calls for risk. Which of the servants in the parable were called faithful? Not the fearful servant who played it safe.

So, two questions: What's holding you back? What are you afraid of?