

Homily for the Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 19, 2017

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: As we journey further into the fall season and approach the Thanksgiving holiday this week, the days grow shorter and the weather becomes colder. Most of us adapt to the increased darkness as well as the colder weather, spending less time outdoors and more time doing any variety of indoor activities. In this way, Mother Nature brings us a season that is suited to quiet and contemplation.

Just as nature seems to encourage us to slow down a bit during this season, so too, does the Church invite us to adopt a more contemplative spirit as we approach the end of our liturgical year and prepare to enter the season of Advent, looking forward to the celebration of our Lord's birth at Christmas. However, before we can get to this joyous celebration, these last days of the liturgical year call for us to consider whether we are prepared to meet our Lord.

In the past couple of weeks, our readings have invited us to reflect on this very topic. Last Sunday, we were reminded in the parable of the ten virgins that we should stay awake, for we know not the day or the hour at which our Lord will come. Just a few moments ago, we heard in our second reading that the Lord comes like a thief in the night. Both of these clearly point to the necessity of living as Christ's disciples each and every day so that we might be prepared for whenever we are called to meet our Lord.

In the parable of the talents that we heard in today's Gospel, Our Lord tells of a man who was embarking on a journey, but before leaving summoned his servants and gave to each of them a certain amount of money to care for in his absence. Two of the servants went out and used what their master had given them wisely and, in turn, saw a return and doubled what they had been given. However, the third servant, fearful of the master, kept to himself what he had been given and returned only that to the master. The two that used the gift wisely and saw a return on what they had been given are invited to share their master's joy, whereas the one who kept to himself what he had been given was cast out.

In trying to understand this parable, there is room for confusion when one word has multiple meanings, as is the case with the word “talent” in this parable. Today we think of “talent” as a special attribute that a person possesses – in sport, in art, in music or whatever. Talents are the gifts that enable people to excel in a particular area or field in their lives. These talents are not earned, but they can be developed. We are annoyed when we see gifted people who do not use their talents properly; we are particularly impressed with people who use their talents for the good of others.

The talents in today’s Gospel are different, however: more like sums of money that can be invested, which is what two characters in the parable do with them. The talent was a measure of weight of an amount of metal. A single talent of silver was worth more than fifteen times the basic daily wage of the time, so gifts of one, two or five talents were very extravagant. One man, however, does what people in New Testament times were advised to do with their money: he buried it for safety. Two thousand years ago the sensible thing was to dig a hole and bury your savings because it was too easy for burglars literally to break a hole in the wall of a house and steal valuables.

Parables are notorious for turning upside down the expected order of things, and this one is no exception. The high risk takers are rewarded for their audacity; the prudent one is punished. It is clear that playing safe with God's gifts is not an option in the kingdom of heaven.

We may wonder how this parable speaks to us today. Perhaps the clue is in the reward. Those who took risks are not given extra talents; they are praised identically for being good and faithful servants, and they are invited to come and share their master's happiness. The one who played safe, risking nothing for his master, is deprived of his talent and cast out.

The emphasis is on the positive, however. This parable reminds us that we have been given much by God. We don't have the option of not using our gifts to build God's kingdom. We are the servants; the talents are the gifts that God has bestowed on us - our intelligence, our ability to love, our skills, and even temporal goods; the journey that the master takes signifies the duration of our life; his unexpected return represents our death; the settling of accounts our judgement; and the banquet is Heaven. Whatever we invest, the promised reward is to share in the happiness of the master's kingdom.

It is a timely idea to consider during this month of November when we remember in our prayers those who have died. We pray for them, and for ourselves, secure in the promise that if we invest in the kingdom of God, we can look forward to a life that takes us into the fullness of God's life itself. It is the perfection of anything we could ever hope for.

As we prepare for the end of our liturgical year and enter into the season of Advent, may we use this time to reflect on our lives and seek to understand whether we utilize the gifts that our Lord has given us to build up the kingdom of God on earth, so living the stewardship and discipleship way of life, or whether we keep them to ourselves for our own gain.

Yesterday was a very important and historic day in the life of our diocese, as the Members of our Diocesan Synod voted overwhelmingly at our Final Session to declare that "the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition."

I certainly hope that each of us can say that we live as good stewards of our talents by our striving to live as Christ's disciples on a daily basis. If,

however, we find ourselves falling short in this matter, let us seek to model our lives after that of our Blessed Mother, the model disciple of her Son. May we be ever prepared for when the Lord arrives, so that we too might hear Him say, *Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.*¹

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Matthew 25:21