

GIVING OF OUR TALENTS (Mt 25:14-30)

Father Boudreaux answers the phone, and a voice on the other end says,

“Hello, is this Father Boudreaux?”

“Dat’s right,” he replies.

“This is the IRS. Can you help us?”

“Mais, I’ll try.”

“Do you know a Jacques Thibodeaux?”

“I sho’ do.”

“Is he a member of your congregation?”

“He sho’ is.”

“Did he donate \$10,000 to the church?”

“He sho’ will.”

At first glance we may think that this parable by Jesus is him telling us that we need to be concerned about our financial affairs and to go out and double our money in order for God to be pleased with us. But we know better than that; there has to be a spiritual message in there somewhere. So let’s search a little deeper.

God creates people and **entrusts** to them gifts and responsibilities. At the death of the person, or through a special historical event, or at the end of time there will be an accounting with God of what we have done with those gifts. Notice that I did not say that God “gives” the gifts, but that He “entrusts” the gifts. “To give” implies that what we are given is now ours; “to entrust” implies there is responsibility for properly managing what was entrusted. Therefore, this parable is about stewardship, a relationship between the Creator and the creature. God has confidence in us when he entrusts talents to us, **His** possessions and **His** graces to bear fruit. What is at stake here is **our** active cooperation in building the Kingdom of God.

As spiritual beings we are subject to spiritual laws which are different than physical or earthly laws. The physical laws say that when you give

something away, you have less than before. If you have \$5 and you give one away, you now have less, only \$4. In contrast, spiritual laws say that when spirit is given away, there is more of it --- the other person has received it and what you now have has been increased, and this increase is a doubling of what was given. Five talents becomes five more; two talents becomes two more; even one talent becomes one more. If I have \$5 and I encounter someone who is hungry and I spend \$1 to buy that person some food, I am in the same financial situation as before --- I now have only \$4. But if in the course of spending that \$1 I get to know the hungry person as a real person, I come away from that encounter with a bigger heart, with more understanding and compassion, with a joy inside that \$1 could not buy in any other way.

What prevents our talents from increasing, from doubling, from producing much fruit is **fear**. There is a wonderful quote from Nelson Mandela, who was a prisoner for 27 years in South Africa before becoming the first black President of that country. The quote goes:

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous
talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve
the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other
people won’t feel insecure around us.
We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is
within us.
It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.”*

We are afraid of being judged by others but especially afraid of being judged by God. According to Jesus, however, this is the worst sin: to distort the image of God, to think of God as a dangerous and inaccessible tyrant. We do not see God as the most loving Father that He is, as a God who enters into a covenant with us promising to always be there for us, giving us all that we need, as a God who always shows mercy and forgiveness even when we fall. Our God is a God whom we should **want** to please, **want** to love, **want** to give our everything to, if for no other reason than purely selfish motives knowing that what we give will be doubled in return.

The servant in the gospel was condemned not because he refused to serve, but because he had an image of God which was completely contrary to who God really is. He was afraid of God. Jesus always showed a

total love of God, his Father, his Abba, his daddy, describing God with the tenderness of a little child looking adoringly into the eyes of his parent.

We have been trained to think of talents as something special that we can “do” --- dribble a basketball, throw a football, acting, singing, painting, etc. And at the art show last weekend we saw some wonderful exhibits by people whom we would classify as “talented.” But I’m going to offer a different perspective on the “talents” of which Jesus is speaking about in the parable. I think the talents which God entrusts to us are those things which are most dear to **Him** --- love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. God wants us to become like Himself; God wants us to become one, united as one body in Jesus Christ. Jesus told us to be holy as his Father is holy. We become holy by using the talents of love, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. Jesus showed us those talents from God while he was here and told us to do as he did. “Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12).” “Go and learn the meaning of the words ‘it is mercy I desire, not sacrifice (Mt 9:13).’” “Forgive your brother seventy times seven times (Mt 18:22).” These are the talents which are doubled each time we use them.

And, yes, some people are given more of these talents than others. They receive more because they give more. We recognized in Mother Theresa of Calcutta an abundance of these talents; our beloved Pope John Paul II asked for forgiveness from those people whom our church has hurt over the centuries --- he even forgave the man who tried to kill him. Though we have not been entrusted with as much as they were, we can draw inspiration from their use of love and forgiveness, mercy and compassion. We, too, each and every one of us, have been entrusted with those same talents in proportion to the extent to which we are called to use them. And the more we use them, the more we have.

Over 9 years ago, I gave up a lucrative job and began a journey which led to our ordination to the Permanent Diaconate. Since I left the job, I have watched as the financial gains of the oil industry have exploded. And the employees have shared handsomely in those gains. As I weigh the financial costs versus the spiritual gains of these past 9 years, there is no doubt whatsoever that I chose the right path. Don’t get me wrong --- I miss the money, what it could have bought, the vacations we could have taken, the beautiful and challenging golf courses I could have played, the 2nd home we might have purchased on the coast, the extra money for retirement. But if my goal in life is to become holy as my heavenly Father is holy, if my mission on this earth is to build the kingdom of God, if my purpose in this life is to gain eternal life, then these past 9 years have increased my spiritual wealth a thousand fold. I still have a long ways to go to achieve the holiness to which I am called, but the talents of love,

mercy, compassion, and forgiveness keep growing inside of me the more I use them.

God wants every one of us to succeed in becoming holy, to be spiritually wealthy. So let us go forth to love one another, to show mercy to the poor and hurting, to have compassion for the sick and the dying, and to forgive those who have hurt us.

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