

33 SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

NOVEMBER 19, 2017

REFLECTION

Gospel Matthew 25: 14-30

The Gospel of Matthew contains five major speeches of Jesus. The first of those speeches is the Sermon on the Mount. There are four other lengthy teachings of Jesus. Today's Gospel is from the last major speech and it is called the Eschatological Discourse. Eschatological means Jesus is talking to us about the last things; the end of the world, the coming of the Son of Man on the last day, the last judgment, and the arrival of God's kingdom in its fullness.

That is the context for today's Gospel. The return of the Master (the Lord) represents the last judgment when the Lord will ask each of us "what did you do with the gifts I have given you?" The gifts that had been given to the servants were talents, which was a certain weight of gold or silver. It might be interesting to mention it was through familiarity with this word talent in today's Gospel that in the Middle Ages the word talent came to mean a special gift of being able to do something well.

Younger people are encouraged to begin planning early in life and certainly to begin saving. In many ways our future is already upon us. We invest in our future and pray that everything will be Ok. Nearing the end of the liturgical year, the Gospel draws our attention to another future; life after death. As with retirement, we must prepare for, invest in this future. This Sunday's Gospel parable raises the issue of investments and benefits and directs us to think of how we await that future.

The Master gave to the three servants in the gospel "each according to his ability." We have not all been given the same sum of talents, but Jesus, our Master, has invested in every one of us. We are not judged according to the amount given us, but we are judged by the choices we make to use to the fullest potential what Jesus has invested in us. The most important choice we make in life is fidelity to whatever we are called to do-even in what seems to be small matters. The continuation of

Jesus' saving work depends upon this fidelity. If we are faithful, Jesus will judge us worthy beneficiaries of the greatest return on any investment; a share in the riches of the "Master's joy" – eternal life.

God doesn't want back the gifts he gives us; he wants us to use them to help others and to increase them in ourselves. He doesn't want us to bury them in the ground until we see our end is near and then we can dig them up so as to return them to the Lord. We've been told many times that using the gifts we've been given, whatever they might be, will help us be successful in this life. Jesus wants us to be successful spiritually by using the spiritual gifts we've been given; the Scriptures, the Sacraments, the time we can use for prayer, being good to others, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If we do nothing with the graces (talents) and opportunities God has given us, it will not be a good thing.

We are now living in the delay before our Master's return. This parable teaches what to do during this time of waiting – it is not empty time, for sure. We are to live in such a way that we grow in our greatest "possession" – the divine Life that has been given us. If, like the lazy servant in the parable, we focus on our fear and Christ's judgment, we will be paralyzed in our ability to continue using the "investments" we have been given to continue Christ's work of salvation. However, if we focus on the promised share in the "Master's joy," then we will be willing to risk what we have in order to grow in our most prized possession – our share in divine Life and the relationship with Christ that entails. The Christian life and journey of discipleship begins with our being given an unmerited share in God's Life. When we are faithful it will end wondrously – we will enter fully into the "Master's joy." AMEN.