

November 19, 2017  
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Matthew 25:14-30

[Jesus told his disciples this parable.] ("It will be as when) a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one--to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, '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.' (Then) the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, '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.' Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.

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. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

Background:

In the parable that is our text for this Sunday, the Master is going on a long journey and giving each of his servants an unbelievable sum of money. A talent was the equivalent of 6,000 denarii and one denarius was the usual daily wage. Even the servant who received one talent has received an enormous amount of money. The difference in the amount each has received is not the issue. The Master has placed a great amount of trust in each of the servants. The first two servants are very industrious and have found ways to double the master's wealth. The last, however, has protected the master's wealth out of fear, but returns it in full. He has not used what was given him so that it would increase.

When Jesus was telling the original parable, those who were hearing it would have been peasants who had little or no wealth. For them, a person who had so much wealth that he could have divided it among three servants would have been scandalous. It would have been presumed that the wealth was gotten by depriving others, or if not, the master should have used his wealth to expand his reputation by sponsoring others in the community who had little. But instead, this one expects that the servants return what has been entrusted to them, with a profit. For the average person to whom Jesus told the parables, this story makes little or no sense. The parable only works as a story about something other than material wealth.

The 25th chapter of Matthew consists of three parables about the coming of the reign of God. The first parable is the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) that was the gospel text last Sunday. The second parable is of the generous master who shares his wealth with his servants (Matthew 25:14-30); it is the gospel text for this Sunday. The last parable is that of the final judgment, when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats according

to how they have treated the least among them (Matthew 25:31-46.) This parable will be the text for next Sunday, the feast of Christ the King. Matthew begins the 26th chapter with Jesus speaking to his disciples of his approaching betrayal and death. “When Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples, ‘You know that in two days’ time it will be Passover, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’” (Matthew 26:1-2) By the end of the 26th chapter Jesus is arrested, and Peter has denied him three times. It will be helpful to understand these parables in light of their context in Matthew’s gospel, and in light of how the early Christians reflected on them to shed light on their own relationship to God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What talents and gifts has God given to you?
2. Are there times when you are more aware of the talents and gifts of others than of your own? What is happening around and within you during those times?
3. How is the attitude of the first two servants toward their master different from that of the last servant? Of the two different attitudes, which seems to be closer to the one you seem to live most of your life?
4. What kind of temptations might arise because the master is a long time in returning?
5. Do you value your faith relationship with God as a gift to you? What do you do to protect that gift, nurture it, and foster its development?
6. Do you think God expects you to develop and share with others the gifts that you have been given?
7. When do you experience God’s invitation to “come share your Master’s joy?”
8. When do you experience God’s saying that you are a “wicked, lazy servant?”
9. Can you take some time to talk to God about how you feel about the gifts that you have been given, how you experience God’s desire for you, or what you hear God saying to you in this gospel?

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