

Homily for Sunday, November 15, 2020

We are almost finished with the Liturgical Year. As always, during these last weeks the readings emphasize the end-times when Christ comes again – should that be today, or in the far-flung future. We are in the middle of three Sundays where we are reading through the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel According to Matthew. And each reading offers us a parable about our meeting God at the time of judgement. And it is customary for us to apply these lessons to ourselves individually, as we may die and meet Our Lord in our particular judgement before the Second Coming.

Last Week I mentioned that perhaps one way to understand some of the parables is in the context of the Two Greatest Commandments – To Love the Lord Our God with All Our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. While they go together as one, sometimes the gospel teaching is concentrating on one or the other. This week, Jesus’ parable is directed at Loving God first and totally.

The judgement Scene this week uses the analogy of servants standing before their boss to give an account of how they have been responsible with the resources for which they were made stewards.

The criterion of the judgement is whether or not they used their talents. Did they do their best to make them grow, or did they hug them tight, and even bury them, keeping them out of sight.

In terms of God, Did they love God totally – so much that they wanted His gifts to flourish through their lives?

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Jesus’ parable used the image of being given a Talent. A Talent was a measure of weight.

A Talent was measured differently in different places and times. But to give an approximation, one source I checked (The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible) suggested that in Old Testament times it was the about Seventy-five pounds. Seventy-five pounds of silver was, in New Testament times, about six thousand Drachmas. A drachma was one-day’s pay for a common worker.

That is greater than sixteen year's wages. Assuming the current poverty threshold at Twenty-five Thousand dollars for a four person household – then in today's terms, that is a minimum of four hundred thousand dollars per Talent.

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So Our Lord told a story about a rich person who called in three employees. He gave one of them two million dollars to work with while he was away. He gave one eight hundred thousand dollars. And he gave one four hundred thousand dollars. He gave them this according to their abilities, that they may increase their abilities. And he gave them this so that he might judge whether they will be given greater responsibilities and they will enter into his joy, or whether they will be thrown out as wicked, lazy, and worthless.

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It is from this use of the word Talent in the gospels that our Christian cultures have use the word Talent to refer to the capabilities that we have been given. Our talents are capabilities that we are encouraged to grow and increase. And like the ancient measure of weight, they are indeed heavy and valuable.

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Now that is the parable, that is the analogy, the image, the metaphor Jesus gives us. In this case, the Talent is – a person's faith. Faith both in the sense of: the Christian revelation; and one's personal relationship with Christ.

Christian Revelation: God wants everyone to come to know Him and be saved from sin, darkness, and death. That means all of us who are baptized, all of us who have been given the talent (the gift) of faith – need to share it with others so that more people may come to know Christ; so that the Reign of God may increase.

Personal Relationship with God: God wants us to draw closer to Him our whole life. We are: to draw closer to the Light; to let God make us holier; to love God more and let God's love reach every corner of our hearts and lives.

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The judgement in the parable last week was whether one was prepared, wise, and ready for the Lord's return.

The judgment in the parable today is whether one has increased the Kingdom, brought more people to the Lord, loved more, and come closer to God. In a word – increased the gigantic Talent of faith God has given. The judgment is whether one has let faith be yeast in dough – making the whole mass to rise.

It is hard to do this. The parable describes the increasing of financial wealth as being the product of work and risk. It no doubt takes imagination and courage. It is so scary that the reaction of the third servant was to hide the gift.

In the same way, burying faith is akin to not proclaiming Christ in our words and actions and life and love – this has consequences.

This is a frightening and challenging lesson for all of us. People don't want others to label them based on their religion. And people don't want others to see if they live up to their faith. The world encourages religion to be kept quiet and inside the walls of the Church.

Yet...Even as some people refuse to be Confirmed or Married in the Church because they either are afraid or do not want the work of increasing the Kingdom – still, every year we bring people of all ages into the Church. They are saying Yes to Christ. And they know this means that they are to care for that faith and let it grow within them and be proclaimed by them. And many teenagers who were baptized as infants get Confirmed so that the Holy Spirit may strengthen their baptismal faith.

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Salvation is the greatest gift we have been given. And we are called to increase in this life in the Trinity that we have been given. We pray we are not the cause of others saying No to increasing Faith.

As one person put it, "Faith doesn't survive in a person who buries it! Faith multiplies only in those who share it with others." (Bishop Mueggenburg)

The parable ends with the sobering image of the one who buried his gift as being thrown out.

But our desire is to be like the ones who nurtured and increased the massive riches they were put in charge of. We want to hear the only words worth hearing when we stand before our Lord and Maker, “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.”

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