

## **33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A**

*Proverbs 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 + Psalm 128 + 1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 5: 1-6 + Matthew 25: 14-30*  
November 13, 2011

In the Sacred Scriptures, the word “fear” is used in two totally different ways. In one context, such as in today’s psalm, those are called blessed who “fear the Lord.” In another context, such as in the parable of the talents in Matthew’s Gospel, fear is a paralyzing, destructive force.

Out of “fear of the master”, the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant in today’s Gospel buries the talent given to him.

This is an example of a fear that brings death, that is death-dealing.

The fear possessing this servant distorts reality,

so that he sees his Master as harsh and demanding instead of generous and good.

This servant’s fear blinds him to the fact that it is the Master’s very own talent the servant has been given; it is the Master who trusts him with such a great gift.

This kind of fear paralyzes and causes this servant to lose what he has been given.

The other kind of fear in the Scriptures is life-giving.

It is the kind of fear the worthy wife has in Proverbs, called the “fear of the Lord.”

This is fear in a good sense, and the word “fear” in this instance is better translated as “awe.”

The worthy wife sees with eyes of faith how she lives her life in the presence of the Lord, and so she is filled with awe and wonder at the glory of God, the beauty of God, and the power of God.

This healthy “fear” impels her to use the gifts given her by such a glorious, loving God.

This “worthy wife who fears the Lord” knows the Lord has given her creative hands that can make clothes to bring warmth to her family and to others,

hands that are able to touch those who are hurting with healing love.

Her hands are never idle—she uses all the resources at her disposal to be a blessing to others.

This woman of deep faith understands this truth---gifts without measure flow from the loving hands of God into her hands to be given away.

We have to get our image of God right, and understand that God is love--- that love is what God does.

That God gives in abundance—that’s the only way God knows how to give.

God's ways are not our ways,  
for God does not adjust his reaction to suit good people or bad.  
Rather, God sends rain upon the good and the bad,  
his sun shines on those who are loving and those who are not.

The way God love us should fill us with wonder and awe.  
God's love cuts through the valleys and mountains of our lives,  
through the heights of sanctity and the depths of depravity.  
The Master of the universe does not turn aside from anyone---in His love,  
God reaches out to sinners and to saints, to bless all with the abundance of his love.

You do not have to be good before God will love you—the opposite is actually true.  
If you are good, it is because God has already made you so.  
You do not have to try to be good before God will forgive you.  
If you want to try to be good, that is because God is loving you.  
You do not need to repent before you will be absolved by God.  
If you want to be forgiven, that is because God is forgiving you.

You do not have to do anything or pay anything in exchange for God's love.  
It is given as freely as the air you breathe.

There is just one thing you need: you have to be ready to take a risk.  
You have to let go of trusting in what belongs to you.  
You have to let go of placing your trust in your possessions of every kind.  
You have to have faith in God's love,  
of becoming yourself as loving as God is loving, as generous as God is generous.  
That can be a scary thought for some people.

Once we know the unconditional, glorious, life-giving love of God, everything changes.  
We see the world, and our place in it, differently.  
We see others differently, and we look with new eyes upon what we have in this world.

The first two servants in today's Gospel understood the possessions they had did not belong to them but belonged to the Master, who entrusted his possessions to them.”  
This is such an important concept in living Stewardship as a way of life,  
because the good steward knows that their life and their gifts  
do not ultimately belong to them.  
They are given by God to be developed and multiplied and then returned to the Master.  
Ultimately these “possessions” belong to God.

Those disciples embracing Stewardship as a way of life refuse to engage in the deadly game of comparison.

They do not focus on the gifts others have been given by the Master, but only focus on the gifts they have been given and on finding a way to develop and share these gifts. Note that both of the servants who developed the talents given to them, who took the risk to do something with these talents, entered into the “Master’s joy.” It did not matter how many talents they received---one five and the other two--- but what they did with the talents given to them.

The Parable of the Talents is one of three end-time parables found in Matthew 25, where Jesus reveals how we will be judged at the end of our life.

Those servants who have taken the risk to develop, use, and share the talents given by the Master are able to enter into eternal joy.

Faithful in small matters, having shown they are able to respond to the Master’s trusting love—that they are response-able--- they can enter into his joy forever.

When the gifted young Polish actor Karol Wojtyla decided to try his vocation as a priest, his friends tried to dissuade him by appealing to this very parable of the talents.

They said to him that he would be burying his talent for acting if he entered the priesthood.

But Karol’s friends were starting from the wrong place.

They placed the emphasis in this parable on “me” and “my gifts.”

Karol, being a man of deep faith, started from another place, recognizing that his gifts were not his own but were given by God to be used as God willed.

Karol did not start with his gifts but with what God was calling him to do and be.

Then as Pope John Paul II, his theater skills found a fulfillment he could have never anticipated.

We also must be attentive to what God is calling us to be and do.

We must take the risk of opening our ears to the Master who calls us and to the cries of the people around us.

How are we being called to love God and our neighbor?

If we have the courage to listen to God’s call, even when the challenges seem beyond us, we may discover gifts we never knew we had.

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