



Ordinary Sunday 33

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THE NEW SHOFAR

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Matthew 25:14-30 - God demands "fruit" from us

Every Christian is filled with an abundance talents from heaven

Today we are reflection on Matthew's third Kingdom parable and it continues to deal with the question of what the disciples of Christ need to be doing while they live in the time before the return of the Son of Man as Judge of all things. In it, Matthew reminds his Church that there was going to be a delay in the coming of The End and they were living in that interim time.

Jesus begins this parable with the situation of the Church - ¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. This man has not gone altogether. He is going away for a period of time that is not specified. What is understood that when the journey is over, he will return. Everybody knows this reality.

What talents has God given to our Church? How are they manifested among us? Why have we been given them? Can we come up with a priority of talents that match a priority of tasks to be done? How would we describe what God has been doing in the world?

The Church participates in God's work

Having set the scene, he now delegates responsibility for farm work to his chosen servants. He was not leaving the farm untended. He is worried enough that he makes sure needs are covered. This delegation is represented in financial terms. He gives them varying amounts of money. A talent at that time was a silver coin valued at about 6,000 denarii. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's pay for a day's work. Commentators sometimes equate the talent with a million dollars to provide an

equivalent in today's world. There is no shortage of money being poured out to these men so that the work of the farm could continue without a break.

The value itself is not a key part of the meaning of the parable as the focus remains on the question of *stewardship*, on what they do with the money entrusted to them. On the level of meaning, these talents are probably meant to point towards gifts and charism, the abilities that have been given by God for the work of the Mission. For Matthew's Church, the temporary departure of this man is synonymous with the temporary departure of the Risen Christ. Matthew adds the word *immediately* to the story and so adds a sense of urgency to the responsibilities handed over to the servants. The work is to begin, or perhaps better, the work is to be picked up from that very moment, the work is to *continue*. The master may have gone away but the work of farming does not have a pause.

Matthew keeps the focus on the need to be "doing" mission rather than on the value of the talents. Even the tiniest amount can produce great results. What is this saying about our own individual Christian situation and the pastoral priorities of our faith communities (parishes)? How are we "feeding" the world?

The Work of God in creation is “feeding” – “saving” all peoples

It is important for the parable to understand how the whole story revolves around the Farmer, the Master and the farm he has created. He is all about producing food for people to eat and anyone taking a commission on the farm is expected to collaborate in that single goal and purpose.

With all of this in mind, the servants are sent off. We are not told how the first two of these servants used the money. All we know is that they took it and grew it. He *worked with it* and this is the point Jesus is making in his description. Whatever they had been given, they used it. It is the same situation with the second servant. He too took the money, *worked with it* and importantly, he too *grew it*.

If we are called upon to collaborate with the ongoing ministry of Jesus in today's world, where do we think Jesus would be working in our area? In the world around our parish? How is our collaboration going and how do we “collaborate”.

It is the third steward who stands out. He accepted the money and the responsibilities that went with it but he dug a hole and buried it. What he was pursuing was a place where the money could be kept safe for the time when the master returned. He was interested in *maintaining what he had* and was not prepared to take the risks that comes with growth.

They all knew there was to be a reckoning – though they did not know when

The master finally returns and there was the expected settling of accounts, an examination of what the servants had done with the money that had been given into their care. And so it is with the return of the Son of Man. That too will be time for *settling accounts*. The accounts given by each of the servants, apart from the amounts involved, use the same wording. They are praised for using the talents given to them and for growing it. No mention is given to the amount of growth, just that there was growth.

They are both rewarded. The blessings given to them are equally enormous. Come the eschatological judgment, those who are faithful will receive blessings that are greater than could ever be imagined. These blessings are a part of entering into the household of the master...*Come and share your master's happiness!*'

Unlike the others, the third servant does not begin with the amount of money he had been given. He offers his assessment of the Master which is meant to be a justification of his actions. He understood that the Master was not the easiest of people with whom to work. That fear should have pushed him to at least do a minimum - take the money and invest it in a safe place. At least in that way he would have earned a little interest. First of all, he is judged harshly - as being *wicked*. His wickedness was that he had not grown the money. He did not steal it, he simply wasted it *by not using it*. For Jesus the man's wickedness includes his *laziness*. Judgment is followed by the punishment. This is reflected by the more general principle of Jesus that come the final judgment, one thing will be clear... ²⁹ *For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

A final judgment is a fundamental part of biblical theology. How much of a role does it play in our own spiritual living and in the ministry of our parish? If we were to die tonight, what do we think we are bringing to the Master? Why is this man's laziness condemned harshly as “wicked”? What does that say about our responses to God's mission today? What would that third servant look like in today's parish?