

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Proverbs 31:10-13.19-20.30-31 / Matthew 25:14-30)
19.11.2017
The parable of the talents

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are familiar with the parable of the talents that we have just listened to. In ordinary speech, a “talent” refers to a personal gift which is visible in our life. We all have human talents which we have received from God. One is a great musician, another a good singer or an impressive athlete. Someone is a gifted cook or has green fingers. Another person is a good teacher, another a medical doctor able to provide a sure diagnosis. Someone is a good speaker, another a fine writer. Each one of us can add his or her own talent to the list. Today’s first reading from the book of Proverbs draws our attention to a person who has received a talent and makes it grow: In this text we are presented with the well-known portrait of a strong woman, a perfect wife and mistress of the household. It is obvious that a wise woman like this has received talents and developed them. Our talents are innumerable, often hardly recognisable, but yet so significant: For the human talents each one of us has received we should be grateful to God and give Him thanks. We are all called to make our talents grow and to use them for the good of others. This is the message of today’s gospel teaching.

But the parable of the talents goes further and deeper than that. In this parable, the man represents Jesus. We are the servants, and the talents are the Lord’s wealth which he has entrusted to us. The talents are the Lord’s most precious gifts. What are they? The Lord’s precious gifts are His Word – the Sacred Scriptures –, the Eucharist, our faith in our heavenly Father, our trust in Jesus, the Son of God, who reveals to us that we are the beloved children of our heavenly Father. The Lord’s gifts are his forgiveness, his mercy, his tenderness. This is the wealth that Jesus entrusts to us, not just to hold it secure but to make it grow.

The Lord has entrusted talents to us so that we might make them bear fruit. It is not a matter of putting our talents under lock and key in a safe. The hole dug in the ground by “the wicked and lazy servant” points to a *fear of risk*. Such fear blocks all creativity and the fruitfulness of love. Jesus wants us to use our talents for the benefit of others. This is how our talents grow. So we can ask ourselves: What have we done with the talents we have received? How many people have we encouraged with our hope? How much love have we shared with our neighbour, not just with a few select people, but with all those who cross our path whoever and whatever those people may be?

The third man of the parable buried the talent he had received; he hid it in a hole, because he was afraid of losing everything. In fact to develop our talents involves risk. One of the talents that we have all received is the gospel. To live our lives according to the spirit of the gospel is to follow the way the gospel indicates to us when we are confronted with a moral dilemma or have to make a political choice, for example. To follow this way can bring mockery upon us; it can awaken contempt, opposition, and even suffering and death. So in certain situations, the temptation for us can be to bury our talent. This is somewhat understandable. But we should

never forget that our mission is to make our talent grow; it is to make it bear fruit, whatever the cost involved.

Today's parable urges us not to bury the Word of God, but to bring it to bear upon all our relationships and every situation in which we find ourselves.

The parable urges us not to retain for ourselves the Lord's forgiveness received in the sacrament of reconciliation, but to give flesh to it in our relationships with one another at a personal, social or political level, by asking forgiveness from and forgiving one another.

Today's parable urges us to share the Lord's mercy by showing mercy all around us.

As Ireland prepares to host the world meeting of families, we are provided with an opportunity to become aware of all the talents we have received in our family life.

To be a loving wife or a loving husband, to be a caring mother or a caring father, or to be a loving child, we need to receive the talent required for it. The marriage between a man and a woman is the sacrament, the sign of God's covenant of love with his people. Married couples need a special talent –a grace from God- to make a success of their marriage. There are a lot of talents in family life which were received and should bear fruit. The task for us today is to identify the talents we have received in our family life and to see how we can make these bear fruit. Maybe we have to realise that we have dug a hole in the ground and buried our talents, that's to say, forgotten them. It is never too late to dig up and retrieve what we have buried, to change our way and begin to bear fruit. The point is not to lament about our past failures, but to choose this day as the day when we begin anew, accepting to welcome our talents and to make them grow. Today is a new beginning. Let us seize the opportunity it provides.