33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Proverbs 31:10-13.19-20.30.31 / Matthew 25:14-30)
15.11.2026
*Fear vs Fruitfulness*

Many people ask themselves why the master displays such an aggressivity towards the last of the three servants. Why is he so angry against this poor man?

The fact is that the servant's attitude is emblematic of a great spiritual problem – maybe the greatest of all the problems in the Bible. The servant said to his master: "I was afraid and I hid your talent." The servant's words are identical to those spoken by Adam after he ate the fruit: "I was afraid and I hid myself" (Gn 3:10).

Through the centuries, from Adam to the third servant, and from him to us now, the great drama of human beings is that they are overwhelmed by fear of God to the point of hiding themselves, of burying their lives and preventing them from bearing much fruit.

It seems to me difficult to understand why and how in our Churches, for so long, we thought that the best way to bring people to faith was to emphasise fear of God. From the beginning to the end of the Bible we read like a constant refrain: "Do not be afraid." Moreover St John is quite clear that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) and that "love drives out fear" (1 Jn 4:18). Fear cannot be – certainly should not be – the driving-force of our relationship with God because fear ultimately paralyses us or leads to violence and rejection. It must be clear to us that nothing is to be gained by fear. People must be drawn to Love by love.

But that is not all, fear also prevents us from growing in mature and adult faith, it makes us play hide and seek with God. It turns us into over-scrupulous and self-righteous, law-and-order driven Christians.

More deeply, the childish fear of God says something about the image of God we worship and want to imitate: is God really a big brother who looks at us askance from afar or a punctilious judge who longs to punish us?

The fear-driven servant who did nothing with God's talent hindered his life from blossoming and giving praise to God, he shrunk and shrivelled. He refused to cooperate with grace and to take the risks required to embrace life and grow to the full stature of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13).

He mistakenly thought that not casting out into the deep (cf. Lk 5:4) was a good option. It has been – and still is – a great temptation for Christians to believe that faith can be a cosy and smooth journey; that it entails no challenge, no letting go, no conversion, and no risk-taking. In fact no risk-taking in faith is not an option for life but for mere survival.

Another aspect which makes the case of the third servant more difficult to defend is that he remained alone. He stayed on his own with his buried talent while the other two servants engaged with others in order to make their talents fructified.

There is an important lesson for us here. It is that we need others in order to grow and bear fruit. The great individualistic promise of the self-made person is illusory and sterile. It is a lie to claim that we can be great again without relying on others, without taking the risk of dialogue, trust, and fidelity to a commitment. In Christian terms, we have to repeat a core tenet of our faith: we cannot be saved on our own; there can be no real and life-giving love of God without love of others… all others.

We are commissioned to help one another with the talents that God gives us so that, together, we may build a society where all can become who they are truly called to be, for their own good and for the common good. When we are fear-driven, too self-preoccupied, obsessed

with our own security then we impoverish both ourselves and the whole body that we are supposed to form with others.

There are many people around us who are suffering because nobody is ready to help them to develop their personal talents. We need to revisit the depth and the quality of our relationships and ask ourselves whether or not we enrich one another with our talents, whether we are willing to share them generously or whether we rather prefer to bury them.

To see the Father in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 14:9), to leave the shell of a fearful and self-imposed isolation, to participate in the destiny of others, to realise how risky it is, and nevertheless embrace the risk, is the way for us to choose life and to become fully alive. It is here that the third servant failed.

In order to understand our parable today, it may be useful to consider it in the context of the chapter 25 of St Matthew's Gospel. In that chapter, in three parables he told, Jesus aims at sharing with us what "the kingdom of God is like" and what our belonging to this kingdom entails. Last week, we heard Jesus say: "Keep watch" (v. 13), and next week we will hear him say: "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (v. 45)

Unlike the foolish bridesmaids, unlike those who did nothing for the poor, as followers of Christ, we must be focused and intent on staying awake, on being attentive to the needs of others, and, unlike the servant today, not remain stuck in the mud of our fears. In small ways, in our families, communities and countries the Lord longs to see us leaving the barren lands of our fears and of our distorted image of his Father and our Father so that we may enter into the fruitful land of the Kingdom of life and peace that we are called to build together here and now.