

33rd Sunday - Year A **Do you use your talents?** - Fr Gerry O'Shaughnessy sdb

19/11/2023

It is import to reflect on the second parable in the great Mathew 25 trilogy: the parable of the talents. If I was celebrating a family liturgy today I would bring up the children so we could act the story out for the congregation. I always found that it was the children who 'taught' us - their insights into using their talents were always uplifting. They displayed their skills in music, drama, sport and creativity; we were able, as adults, to see how important it was to use those talents and not keep them hidden. This Gospel was always one of favourites to use in a liturgy to mark the start of the academic year; it gave us an opportunity to celebrate the diversity and gifts that a school community brings to the Church.

The danger is that, as we grow older, we can lose our spontaneity and creativity, and those God - given talents can be crushed or put to the side. Today is an ideal opportunity to reflect on your specific talents - God has a plan for the world that only you can help achieve. Your particular talent set are given to you for use and not to be hidden. As St John Henry Newman has reminded us:

"God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about."

In these days, more than ever, we need to pool those talents as we build up our Church. Two weeks ago we were given a chance to celebrate the saints that form our solid and living foundation. Today you are invited to share that sanctity: by using your gifts and talents for the good of others, you can help the saints of today - you CAN be a saint for today.

The author, Jack Finney, wrote a short story entitled, "Contents of a Dead Man's Pocket." It tells the story of a man named Tom who spends months working on a project for his business. He summarizes all his work on a piece of yellow paper. He looks forward to being promoted by the completion of this work. One night, Tom stays home rather than go to the cinema with his wife Clare. He wants to write up his proposal; there will be other nights for fun but tonight he MUST use his time and energy to finish this idea that is going to change his life. An unexpected blast of cold air

from the hallway blows the piece of yellow paper out a window where it becomes lodged on the ledge just beyond Tom's reach – eleven stories above the street below. Tom convinces himself that he can retrieve the paper - he honestly believes has the talent to climb out on the ledge. He manages to get the paper in his pocket but ends up falling to the street below. Contemplating his death, Tom is filled with fear and anger as he realizes all they would find in his pockets would be a piece of yellow paper. His ambition, the time he should have spent with his wife, his own greed, haunts him as he realizes his life has been such a waste.

I am sorry if that story unsettles you, but that is what Jesus did with this parable of the talents - notice how this prophetic parable does not end with the nice “...and they all lived happily ever after” scenario. Rather we end with ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ I suspect many of us already struggle with a nagging sense of failure when it comes to our service for the kingdom. We look at our lives and really don't see much return on the Lord's investment in us. We know we should be more wholehearted, more dedicated, more sacrificial in our service. And does what little I do make any difference? Today, Jesus is telling you that you DO make a difference. Jesus is awesomely, amazingly giving and generous and gracious. He gave his life for us. He forgives us and receives us into his kingdom, not as servants but as friends. He gives us a place in his family not as slaves but as daughters and sons. And then he gives us talents. Some more, some less, but all valuable - all precious. And then he rejoices with us and rewards us for the returns we offer him on the talents he gave us in the first place.

In these strange times, as we rekindle our full understanding of what it is to be ‘Church’ in a post pandemic era, there is a real need to put people first. As we look at our world and see the hatred that leads to a Ukraine, Gaza or Israel, we realise that I have to begin the process of peace. I can blame terrorists or politicians, but the process to true global peace must begin with me: my attitudes, and my personal commitment to peace. If we are not careful our investment priorities become buildings and a need to maintain the status quo. Let us recommit ourselves in 2023 to invest in PEOPLE for the gospel's sake with new vision and passion. This is a vision that has to be rooted in joy as fear can only bring failure - Pope Benedict reminds us:

Today's parable stresses the inner disposition necessary to accept and develop this gift. Fear is the wrong attitude: the servant who is afraid of his master and fears his return hides the coin in the earth and it does not produce any fruit.