

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Proverbs 31:10-13.19-20.30-31 / Matthew 25:14-30)
16.11.2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

The usual understanding of the parable of the talents that we have just heard is: "Use your talents to the best of your ability". This reading of the parable is not false, but it is moralizing and reductive. It does not take into account the ensemble of the parable and especially its eschatological horizon, that is to say its concern with the coming of the Son of Man at the end of time, more precisely his return in glory. The full picture of today's parable is that we have received talents which we are called to make fructify. We will have to render an account to the Lord at the end of time in regard to the talents confided to us.

We have all received talents from God. In the parable, the talents confided by the master were his property. So we can say that when God gives us talents, he gives us something that belongs to Himself. It is even His own being that He confides to us so that we may reveal His love to the world through our lives. The talents given to us are the sign of the great humility of our God who has confidence in us, who trusts in us. God loves us. We are precious to his eyes. In a sense, He does not hesitate to place his future into our hands.

We have received talents but there is always a risk for us to forget them, absorbed as we are by the business and busyness of our lives, and the weight of routine. Perhaps today offers us the opportunity to take time to remember the personal talents the Lord has given to us and to examine if we are making them bear fruit.

Our talents are not necessarily great things. For example, neither you nor me has received the charism of monastic life in the way St Benedict did, he who wrote a Rule for Monks and founded a monastic order which are both still flourishing fifteen centuries later in so many monasteries throughout the world. For most of us, the talents that we have received from the Lord are very simple gifts, in our ordinary everyday lives. Our talent may be a skill or a service: let us think for example of a wife or a mother who looks after her family, and who does this faithfully day after day, year after year. Our first reading from the Book of Proverbs gives us an unforgettable portrait of "the perfect wife" who lives her talent to the full. How many of us make our talent bear all the fruit it could through our work? There are many who do, thank God. Just think of those who teach, those who look after us medically, or those who dispense justice in society for example. Each one can add his or her own personal talents to that list. Our talents invite us to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way, that is to say as God would have us do them: with love, skill and a healthy forgetfulness of ourself.

At the end of time, when the Lord returns, we shall have to give an account of what we have done with our talents. The point for us is not to do the best of our ability with our talents in order to be satisfied with ourselves here and now. The world does not begin with our birth nor does it end with our death. The point is that what we do now will have a consequence for our eternal destiny. If we make our talents bear fruit here and now, we

shall enjoy life with God for ever; we shall have a share in God's unending happiness. And so we see, the perspective of today's gospel parable is much wider than just "use your talents to the best of our ability". There is a preface to this perspective: It is that each one of us is loved by God in a unique way from all eternity. There is an over and beyond perspective to our parable as well. It is that we shall be loved by God for ever, enjoying fullness of happiness in his presence, in communion with all our brothers and sisters in humanity.

For the moment we await the return of the Master. During this time of expectation, we have to be watchful and ready. What does that mean? It means that we have to work hard at making fructify the talents the Lord has given to us. We have to be faithful to the Lord's instructions and carry them out, energetically, with all our God-given ability. We are not to sit back, our arms folded, quietly waiting for the Lord. The time of waiting is meant to be an active time filled by deeds of love.

It is interesting to notice that the master does not punish his servant for misusing his talent, but for not using it at all. "I was afraid" the servant said. It is the fear of the servant that the master does not accept. Fear can cripple discipleship and stand in the way of a genuine following of Jesus. In Jesus' eyes, we are not to be afraid to use our talents and to take risks in the service of the gospel, remembering that our efforts always matter more than the results yielded. To use our talents implies that we make choices and by consequence renounce a lot of other good possibilities. Let us not be afraid to do that! Finally, to use our talents is to love. If we want to love, we have to be inventive. We cannot love without making mistakes, because we are not God. But it is better to love and commit errors than to do nothing in order to be flawless. We are called to love and be fully alive, not to be flawless and half-dead!

Let us remember the talents that we have received from the Lord. Let us not be afraid to make them fructify! Let us not be afraid to be courageous and inventive, and to take risks! One day we shall be hailed as "a good and faithful servant" and called to join in our Master's happiness for ever!