

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A
GOD DOES NOT EXPECT MORE THAN WE CAN DO

*“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your Master’s happiness”
(Matt. 25: 21)*

It cannot be over-emphasised that we shall all leave this world and return to our God and Maker. There will be judgement (Heb. 9: 27), where God will judge us based on our conducts in this life. The Scripture uses different terms with similar nuances to describe our tenure here: pilgrims, sojourners, voyagers, travellers, living in tents, made with human hands; that our homeland is in heaven, where we shall be with Christ where He is, living in homes not made by human hands but by God Himself. As Christians, this is our faith! We live with this hope in view. On this penultimate Sunday in this liturgical cycle, the Readings are all focused on diligence, readiness, accountability and preparations for the Day of the Lord. The question is “How prepared are we for that Day of days?”

God is Generous to All: In the Parable of the Talents presented in the Gospel (Matt. 25: 14-30), the “man, who summoned his servants and shared his property with them before travelling abroad” represents God, Who out of love and generosity shares His gifts to us. To one he gave five talents, two to the second and to the third one talent. Each one is gifted according to his ability – the strongest and the weakest, the ablest and the least, no one is exempt. It is striking that the master in the parable had expectations, which though not expressed in the beginning is overtly expressed on his return: “You wicked and lazy servant! ... You should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have recovered my capital with interest.” No doubts, God expects interests from the gifts and talents He has given to us. Just as God has been generous to us, he expects us to be generous to one another.

You Are Different and Uniquely Talented: There is the strong human tendency to compete, to measure the lines between winners and losers; and these breed jealousy, envy and hatred leading to more heinous crimes and sins against each other. The parable for reflection highlights the fact that we are different and uniquely talented. The generosity of the master is based on individual’s ability – “each in proportion to his ability.” We are not equally gifted: while the gifts are disproportionate, each is proportionate to the ability of the receiver. It reminds me of the Penny Catechism lesson that all those who receive the sacrament do not receive the same grace, but each person receives as much as based on his/her

level of preparation. It is a theological dictum of grace based on the Thomist idea that “Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver (*Quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*). What this communicates to us is to develop a spirit of contentment over that of competition, satisfaction over jealousy, and gratitude over envy. Each of us is called in our uniqueness to respond in our peculiarity.

Be the Best You Can Be: There are three servants to whom the master gave differing gifts or talents. Five, two and one to three different servants. This is how God shares His gifts among us. It is not the quantity of the gifts that matters, what matters is what we do with what we have. These gifts are given so freely that there are no given instructions. Within this atmosphere of freedom, God expects us to make the best use of whatever He has given to us. God does not expect us to perform beyond our abilities, but He does expect us to make the most of our whatever abilities. This is exactly what the servants with the five and two talents did – they simply did their best. They are the image of the “perfect wife” who does not simply maintain peace and confidence of the husband but “always busy with wool and flax, she does her work with eager hands ... she holds out her hand to the poor, she opens her arm to the needy.”

God’s Gift Are Not to be Buried but to be Brought to Life and Light: The third servant with the one talent did not lose his talent. He simply kept it. In fact, he buried it. And this was his sin. If God simply wanted to keep His gifts safe because he was afraid: “I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground”, he said. Fear is our worst enemy: it is very crippling, incapacitating and disabling. One who is afraid never ventures, he never tries. One who is afraid cannot have faith. Think of the number of times God and Christ tell people in the Bible “Do not be afraid!” We can hardly be used, even by God, when we are shrouded in fear. Therefore, be not afraid: whatever we have received from God is not intended to be kept safe by us but to be used for the benefit of all around us. “Go ye and multiply”, He told us at creation. These gifts are to be multiplied by us by sharing it, making them available to others – the poor and the needy. The fact of our uniqueness makes complementarity a necessity. The teacher needs a baby carer as an accountant needs a lawyer; the lawyer needs a doctor, and the doctor needs a cobbler, who needs a builder, who need the garbage man, who needs a mechanic. All these need the priest, as the priests need them all. What can we do without one another? No man is an island.

Little is not an Excuse: You do remember the story of the Widow’s Mite (Mark 12:41–44, Luke 21:1–4)? She gave all she had. Lest you would like to excuse the

man with the one talent that he had just the one and it would not have been wise to risk it. It is not a risk; it is a leap of faith. Believers walk by faith, not by sight says St. Paul (2 Cor. 5: 7). Nothing excuses us from sharing. St John Chrysostom explains thus: "Let no one claim I have one talent, and I can do nothing: even with one you are capable of measuring up. I mean you are not poorer than that widow." Generosity does not depend on the content of our pockets but on the depth of our loving hearts. St. Pope John Paul II says: "No one is so rich that he has nothing to receive, and no one is too poor that he has nothing to offer." We all need to be open to give and to receive. This is why God has given us different gifts in unique measures.

There is a Reward for Every Good Work: On return, the master called those servants went through the accounts. The one who had five made five more. The one who had two made two more. The one who received one, made no income because he simply kept the one talent he received. To the ones who added to what they were given, each was rewarded. The one who hid the master's talent was punished. So too, each of us will be asked to give an account of all the talents we have been given. The ones who have worked hard will be rewarded, the ones who have simply kept, preserved or buried their talents, they shall be punished. Therefore, the time to rise and do it is now.

Be Prepared for the Day of the Lord: At the end of time, when all has been accomplished, the Good Lord comes to take account of our stewardship. What should we do? In the Second Reading (1 Thess. 5: 1-6) St. Paul reminds us of the certainty of the coming of the Day of the Lord; it will be sudden and unexpected. Therefore, he urges us to "stay wide awake and sober" at all times. This is a call for preparation, which has been at the centre of our reflection the last three Sundays. This emphasis reiterates its importance and necessity. Are we ready for the Day?

My dear friends, let us dust off our talents, put them out at the service of others; let us be busy like the perfect wife; let us pull up our sleeves and get down to work for those in need; let us strip ourselves of every form of pride and learn to be humble so that we can forgive, love and serve. And on that day The Master will say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your Master's happiness." May the grace of God be sufficient for us all and guide us through.