

Homily for the 33rd Sunday after Pentecost Parable of the Talents

Have you noticed? It's getting dark earlier. Even here in Southern California, the summer light is fading and we are entering the dark time of the year. The Church is wise. As we wind down into darkness, the Church winds down too. Each of our Gospel stories as we approach the end of the Church year gets darker and darker. In no uncertain terms, it tells us about the end times and prepares us, over and over, every year, for the coming of the Cosmic Christ... the return of that ultimate review: What have you done with your life to bring about the Kingdom of heaven? What have you done with your unique gifts? What have you done to make this world whole again? Be prepared. You don't know when you will be put to the test.

There is nothing very warm and fuzzy about these Gospels coming up. They rattle us. They confront our world. These parables are not God giving us information, but God giving us an invitation and a challenge, an insight, leading to a decision.

Some of the other parables are of a kind of house-keeping, gardener, party-giver quality that I find easier to enter into. “The Kingdom of heaven is like a housewife who lost a coin.” “The Kingdom of heaven is like a King who prepared a marriage party for his son.” “The Kingdom of heaven is like a man who planted a vineyard.” Then there’s the one we heard last week about the kingdom being like a bunch of ladies who had an all-night party but some of them had old batteries in their flashlights and their lights went dim and they wanted to have the spare batteries that their wiser friends had brought for the night—and you know the rest. Jesus ends with the line: “Darkness falls! Be aware! Stay awake! Be prepared, because you don’t know when the Son of Man will come.”

The parable we get today is one of his tough ones. In this one he is not afraid to lay things out in a shocking way. He tosses his story like a hand grenade into our ordered lives, rattles us, and invites us to experience a different reality. He doesn’t spend a lot of time qualifying his

point and making sure everybody gets it. He lays before us the questions and says, if this lies unsolved in your heart, OK—start out by loving the question. Do you know who you are? Do you know your own giftedness? Do you know that you were put on this earth to fulfill one, certain, special role for the good of this human family? Do you know how connected we are, one to the other? Or didn't you notice that when Greece sneezes, the whole world catches a cold?

The Kingdom is Jesus' dream of a healthy and holy society. In his parable today about the silver he speaks to and for the good of the whole Kingdom.

Here is your gift, the Master says. Each gift is tailored to each individual. Use it. Invest it in the way you live your life. Do not just keep it for yourself, but take some risks and enhance it for the good of the Kingdom. As a people, linked one to the other, we can make something of this.

But we? Some days, we get up in the morning and yell at the Master, “Hey! What about me! You gave them more than you gave me!” We compare and complain and measure our gifts not as a good for the whole but against what we think others have. We are competitive. We are not cooperative which is just the opposite.

Just watch how some invest their energies: some sacrifice their health to make money; then sacrifice their money to recover their health but finally come to the end of their lives without having really lived or used their gifts.

Some take what they are given and they live their lives passionately and fully and they invest their abilities and the gifts they have into their very life style and without even knowing it, their investment grows to the good of society and to the satisfaction of the Master.

And in our story, the one who is given a good, solid chunk is still angry and calls the Master lazy: He says hey you! Master! You are a hard man! You reap where you do not sow!

You gather where you did not scatter!
I sat there and tried to incubate that silver you
gave me and nothing came of it. Have it back.
And do your own banking.

But the Master calls him on his blaming and
projection and says—no. It is YOU who have
lived off the fat of the land and the sweat of the
labor of others. You invested nothing I gave
you. You lived off the rest of society and wonder
that nothing came from what I gave you. Unlike
the good and faithful servants, you have proven
yourself worthless. You have, in effect, created a
hellish society—so go--join those where there is
only weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Clearly, this isn't just "Wealth Management
Sunday"! Maybe we can speak of the wealth the
master has given us as talents in our western
sense: as gifts that we have been given that
make each of us brilliantly unique and insightful
and creative in very different ways.

We've already heard that homily a hundred
times about how the gifts we have, in the form
of time, treasure and talent need to be lived out

and shared which is the only way they earn interest!

Parishes use this story to inspire us to contribute wisely and generously at the launch of the stewardship campaign. But we find a little part of ourselves balking, or feeling uneasy, quibbling about how it might be used, or digging in our heels—because we think of the **Church as a place where....**

Ah! But the Church is not a “place where”, but a **“people who!”** As Church, we are a people who work and create and heal and serve and share and rejoice and sacrifice and celebrate and live our lives passionately and well and we begin to see that our investments contribute far beyond individuality and ourselves, but contribute to the very reign of God.

In these dark days of reckoning, this parable offers us a life review. This is a Sunday that’s not about “Wealth Management!” but about seeing how we, each with our unique selves make up a whole—a church who!a marvelous gathering of people who take our

lives seriously and linking our energies together for the good of the whole, we risk and make investments that bloom and grow.

What is your special gift?
How do you invest it for a better world?
How do you see yourself as a living part of this church who...?

The darkness that surrounds us brightens with promise when the master sends us encouragement: Well done! You live your life and you take risks with the gifts I have given you. You are an industrious and reliable person. Well done, good and faithful servant for you further the Kingdom of heaven here, on this earth.

And do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justice, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to do all the work, but neither are you free to abandon it .

Because we are a church who...