

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus spoke this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man on his way abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third, one; each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out.

The man who had received five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now a long time after, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown that you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with the greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

(Matthew 25:14-30, abridged)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- A Jewish *talent* was a very substantial sum of money. A *shekel* contained about 14.5 grams of silver; a *talent* contained more than 43,000 grams! It was about the price of an ox.
- Being an absentee landlord was as common in the time of Jesus as it was in later history.
- The 'talents' are not equally distributed. In God's plan, all are endowed with different 'talents' so that we will recognise our need for each other and practise generosity, kindness and the sharing of the abilities we have.

EXPLORING THE WORD

In today's gospel, Matthew develops the theme of what it means to be living in the in-between time. The Master has given the servants 'talents' and on his return they will be judged according to how they have used those talents and whether they have followed his instructions. A talent was a standard measure of currency in the Near East, and a very large sum indeed. In fact, each servant has been given a treasure. Two perform well, but the third is paralysed by the fear of taking a risk and hides his talent away. His excuse is that he knew his master was an exacting man and so he refused even to try. He condemns himself by not responding to the demands of the master. This gospel challenges us to drop our false notion of God as an exacting master, to appreciate the gifts we have been given, and to use and develop them for our good and the good of others.

What are some of the images of God we may have? Examples include shepherd, judge, Father, nurturer, rock, king, guide.

- Explore together some of the biblical images or metaphors of God presented in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- How may our image of God influence the way we respond to the invitation to enter the kingdom?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are your talents and gifts? How do you use them?
- When do you feel like a 'good and faithful servant'?
- What image of God is presented in this passage? Is he the stern task-master who judges harshly, or the generous one who entrusts great treasure, which must be used wisely so that it will grow?
- What is your image of God? Spend time in reflection on this question this week.
- Share stories of times when you were too afraid to take a risk. What was the outcome? How do you feel now about opportunities lost through being overly cautious?
- This week, use your talents explicitly for the good of others.
- Repeat the first two verses of Psalm 127 often this week:

Happy are those who fear the Lord.

*O blessed are those who fear the Lord
and walk in his ways.*

*By the labour of your hands you shall eat.
You will be happy and prosper.*

Happy are those who fear the Lord.

