

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY A/2005

Those who are in business or are in charge of some important projects know that an evaluation of the job plays a big role. In business a job evaluation is a key element, because it contributes to the assessment of the employees' performance and to see if their salary can be increased or even if they can be left out of the job for lack of performance. In a project an evaluation allows one to judge where the enterprise actually is with regard to the objectives and the result obtained. Without an evaluation any human enterprise will have bankruptcy. The readings of this Sunday are all about the evaluation and the performance expected from those who are at the Lord's service.

The 1st reading addresses this theme by presenting the perfect woman as a model of industriousness and dedication. In spite of some possible polemics to which the description given in this text can give rise, the most important thing it teaches us is that such a lady is a good wife, a generous and religious person, as well as a great worker. This is why she is praised, not because of her beauty, but because of her success that lies in her fidelity to the Lord. With the present crisis of the institution of marriage in society, I wonder if we should not ask also the question of the perfect husband. The perfect husband, who will find him? Who is that perfect husband who brings joy to his wife and happiness to his family?

Mind you that the praises granted to the perfect wife are due to her commitment and performance in working for the good of those under her care. This evocation allows us to see the importance of today's Gospel as inviting us to give the best of ourselves with the talents the Lord has given us. First of all, let me say that very often we see the talents as the qualities and skills that each one has received from God and which have to be developed and not hidden away. More profoundly, however, it is not just about personal qualities and capacity, but all about the responsibility we have vis-à-vis the word of God and its growth in Christian community and in the world.

In fact, Christ has left this world after entrusting to us the goods and powers he had. It is now up to his disciples to act in such a way that what he has entrusted to them may produce abundant fruit. But how? Every one has to take responsibility for some part of this wealth and must strive to make it yield fruit. Each in proportion to his ability must undertake a ministry within the community, a service to the brothers and sisters. In practice, it means that one will be entrusted with announcing the word of God; another will be given the task of preparing the catechumens for baptism; others may help the young couples to prepare for marriage; others will care for the needy, others will try to reconcile the members of the community that might have had dissensions, others still will organize the liturgical celebrations and singing, etc. In other words, not a single treasure of Christ should be allowed to remain unused; the powers conferred to the disciples grow with use and wither with disuse. This enumeration shows already the value of the priesthood and justifies the presence of our seminarians in our midst today.

This is what it means to have five or three talents and to trade them. However, if somebody is not doing his service as asked of him, shall not he hand over his ministry to the community so that his share of service may be entrusted to someone else who can do it faithfully, because all the ministries must be carried out? This is what happened to the third servant. In other words, the only unacceptable behavior is doing nothing. As you can see, with this parable, Jesus wanted all to understand how great is the responsibility of anyone who fails to put to good use the good things of the Lord, thus depriving the community and the world of the fruits that they had the right to expect. But my question is this: How are the “talents” distributed among the members of our community? Don’t we sometimes discourage some by preventing them from carrying out properly their duties and responsibility?

Let me say something about the fear of the third servant. Is it possible to be afraid of Jesus? I am sorry to say, yes. Many Christians are still afraid of God and Christ. This comes from a wrong image of God, where he is seen as a policeman controlling the traffic and punishing anybody breaking the laws. Whoever imagines God like this will end up like the third servant, and will do just what is indispensable. Such a person will just try to avoid mortal sin so as to be on the safe side; he never risks anything new, because whoever commits or whoever tries something new may also make mistakes. Maybe everything did not go well even with the first two servants, but the only one to be condemned was the individual who avoided taking risks.

All that I am saying here can make us understand the importance of the second reading. St Paul reminds us that the Lord will come unexpectedly. Therefore, life must be taken very seriously and we should not lose time. There will be an account of the work done and the fruit yielded. It is not a question here of living in fear, but rather of being realistic by recognizing our responsibility before the Lord. We have to be also thankful to God for his generosity and his fairness for not laying charge upon us except according to our capacities. We should not forget that our industriousness and our fidelity are the condition of our reward at the end of our earthly pilgrimage. Let us ask the Lord to help us work with his talents so that they yield fruit for the glory of his name and for our final reward.



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