

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2008

The success of a business or of any project depends to a large extent on the evaluation the members of the company can bring about their job and their performance at work. The process of evaluation offers an advantage of judging with clarity where the company stands with regard to its objectives and how it performs with regard to its results. All the readings of this Sunday talk about the evaluation and the performance expected from those who are at the service of God.

In the first reading, the book of Proverbs describes the activity and the performance of a good wife. First of all, it says that the value of such a woman does not depend on her external beauty, but on the way she handles her family and on the generosity of her heart. Moreover, she is praised, because she fears the Lord and brings joy to her husband, and those under her care.

Although this text judges a good wife according to the cultural standards of that time, it teaches us, however, that a worthy wife is one who is faithful to her commitments, religious in her life and a hard worker. The text sets also the criteria for a well balanced life of family that reflects in the way a wife assumes the leadership upon her household. These criteria, however, are not exclusive; they can be extended to the husband. The current crisis of marriage and family in our society today raises the question of a worthy husband. Who is that husband and hard worker who brings joy to his wife and happiness to his household?

All this invocation is aimed to remind us that most of the time we are judged, in society and in our lives, according to the way we fulfill our commitments and by our spirit of enterprise. That is the point today's Gospel brings to our meditation in the parable of the talents and the three servants.

All three servants receive possessions from their master, but each one according to his abilities. Those who receive five and two talents understand that they have to take advantage of the situation by investing what they have received and so double the capital. The one who receives one is paralyzed by the fear of losing what he has received and buried it in the ground.

When the master comes back a few years later to settle accounts with them and see what they have done with his donations, the first servants are happy, because they have produced more. The master recognizes their spirit of enterprise and entrusts them with more responsibility. Incapable of a spirit of enterprise, the last servant has done nothing. Moreover, he is harsh with his master whom he judges at mere intention. As a consequence, he is dispossessed of everything and left with hands empty.

What do we learn from this parable? The global context of this parable refers to the history of the Church. In fact, in the time of Jesus, the Scribes and the Pharisees strove to keep the Law exactly as it was. In their own thinking, they wanted to build a fence around the Law. Any change, any development or anything new was to be prohibited. Many times Jesus entered into conflict with them because of that mind and condemned them. Like the servant with one

talent, they wanted to keep things as they were. In this parable, Jesus tells us that there can be no religion without adventure and openness of mind. Imagine if the first Missionaries did not brave dangers to go evangelize in Africa, Asia, and America, what would have become of Christianity?

The parable teaches also that God gives us different gifts, each according to his abilities. What matters most is not how much talent we have, but how we use it. In that perspective, God does not demand of us what we do not have; but rather he wants us to use to the full the abilities we do possess. Of course, we are not equal in talent and ability; but we can be equal in effort. Whatever talent we have, little or great, we must use it for the benefit of our brothers and sister and for the service of God.

The parable teaches us equally that the more gifted we are; more will be demanded of us. The two servants who produced double of what they received are not asked to sit down and cross their arms. They are given more responsibility so that they keep working and produce more again. That is how God works with us.

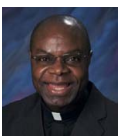
Another thing the parable reminds us is that those who are punished, are not those who have less talents, but those who do not try to use them. The servant with one talent did not lose it, but he simply buried it in the ground. That is worse than to lose it after having tried to work with it. We have to risk our talent for the common good and for the glory of God.

Let me now refer to the last verse of the Gospel that says everyone who has, more will be given; and one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is an expression of a universal truth. What it means is that if we have a talent and exercise it, we can make progress with it. But, if we have a talent and fail to exercise it, we will inevitably lose it. This is a lesson of life that the only way to keep a talent is to use it in the service of God and of our brothers and sisters.

All this development on gifts and talents helps understand the second reading. St Paul reminds us that the Lord will come unexpectedly. Therefore, life must be taken very seriously and we should not sleep in laziness. The time we spend here on earth is a time we have to put to good use the talents God has given us. In the end, he will ask of us an account of the work we would have done.

This does not mean, however, that we have to live in fear, but rather we have to be realistic by assuming our responsibility. We have also to be thankful to God for his generosity and his fairness for not laying charge upon us beyond our abilities. 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 in his Kingdom. May God bless you in the efforts you provide for the change you want to bring into your life!

Proverbs 31, 10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thessalonians 5, 1-6; Matthew 25, 14-30



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