

Thirty third Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk to us about Christian commitment and its consequences for our eternal life. In the first reading, the book of Proverbs describes a portrait of a good housewife in her commitment to her family and in social life. It praises her, not because of her external makeup and beauty, but because of her talents she puts at the service of both her family and the others. Such a woman is a special one, because she is fearful of the Lord, a hard worker, generous and bringer of joy to her husband.

What is behind this text is the idea that whatever might be the beauty of a wife, what counts most are her qualities of heart. However, these qualities would mean nothing if God were not the source of the actions she performs toward her family and the needy.

In our context of the crisis of marriage, this text encourages the couple to go beyond the search for human beauty and to found the stability of their home on God. The text invites also the couple to evaluate the criteria that make them a good partner.

This question of evaluation is at the heart of today's parable of talents and the three servants. In fact, the parable is about a man who, as he was about to go on a long trip, gave his money to his servants in order to make it productive until his return.

According to the ability of each one of them, he gave to one five talents, to another three and to the last one. When he came back, he settled an account with them in order to see how they did. While the first two did well in trading, the last did nothing for fear of losing the money of his master. As a consequence of this handling, he was condemned and punished.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the generosity of God. The talents that the man gave to his servants before travelling symbolize the gifts that God freely gives us. These gifts are given to each one according to his abilities and his skills. If that is the case, there is no reason for being jealous because one has received more than the other. What matters most is not how much talent we have, but how well we use what we have.

That is true in so far as the gifts are given so that we may make them produce. That is the reason why the servant who received one talent got into trouble because he did not trade with it. The teaching, as it can be seen, is that whatever gift we have, we should never minimize it. It is always worthwhile because God who has given us that gift knows the reason why he did so and we should put it to good use. 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.

Another lesson we learn from the Gospel is about the importance of the process of evaluation. In fact, those who are in business know well that any progress and success require a continual assessment of the activities and the direction the company is taking. The aim of such an evaluation is the enhancement of the performance at work, the adaptation to the new demands and the ability to produce more. Without the respect and the application of such a process, it is likely that a business can fail.

That is not only true for human business, but is also true for God's business. We really need to evaluate and assess what we do as individual and community. We have to

continually ask ourselves questions about our relationship with God and our brothers and sisters; we have to ask questions about the progress of our faith and our way of functioning as a community.

A third lesson we learn from the Gospel is that fear creates paralysis. Look what happened to the servant who received one talent. He was taken by the fear of losing the money of his master and did not do anything with it. Because he did so, he was punished and his talent was taken away. The point here is that if we remain fearful, we cannot do anything. We have to take the risk of working with the gifts God has given us, for the glory of his name and the wellbeing of our fellows. It is only by taking the risk that we can do more. As a French proverb says, “Qui ne risque rien n’a rien”, the one who does not risk anything will have nothing.

A fourth lesson we learn is about the demand of being gifted. In fact, when God gifts us more than the ordinary people, he will also be demanding of us. This truth appears clearly in the case of the two servants to whom were given more talents. Once they produced double of what they had received, their master gave them more responsibility so that they keep working and produce more.

Let me formulate the last lesson this way: progress comes out of practice. When Jesus says that “everyone who has, more will be given; and one who has not, even what he has will be taken away”, I believe he wants to invite us to the practice of our talents and gifts. That is true because if we have a talent and exercise it, we will certainly develop it. However, if we have a talent and we do not exercise it, it is obvious that we will end up losing it.

Let us, then, ask the Lord to give us the courage to develop the talents and gifts he has given us. Let us ask him to make us aware of his return so that when he comes back he finds us awake and working with our talents for the glory of his name and the good of our fellows. May God bless you all!

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



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