

**GOSPEL**
**MATTHEW 25:14-30**

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 the 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 you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness."

Last came forward the man who had the one talent. "Sir," said he "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have recovered my capital with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the five talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

**A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS**

In this penultimate Sunday of the liturgical year, the Gospel presents to us the Parable of the Talents. Before setting off on a journey, a man gives his servants talents, which at

that time were coins of considerable value: he gives five talents to one servant, two to another, one to another, to each according to his ability. The servant who had received five talents was resourceful and he traded with them, earning another five. The servant who had received two behaved likewise, and acquired another two. However, the servant who had received one dug a hole in the ground and therein hid his master's coin.

Upon the master's return, this same servant explained to him the reason for this action, saying: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground". This servant did not have a trusting relationship with his master, but was afraid of him, and this hindered him. Fear always immobilizes and often leads to making bad choices. Fear discourages us from taking the initiative; it induces us to take refuge in secure and guaranteed solutions, and thus end up not accomplishing anything good. To move forward and grow on the journey of life, we must not have fear; we must have faith.

This parable helps us understand how important it is to have a true concept of God. We must not think that he is a cruel, hard and severe master who wishes to punish us. If this mistaken image of God is within us our life cannot be fruitful, because we will live in fear and this will not lead us to anything constructive. On the contrary, fear paralyzes us; it causes our self-destruction. We are called to reflect in order to discover what our idea of God really is. Already in the Old Testament he revealed himself as "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). And Jesus always showed us that God is not a severe or intolerant master, but a father full of love, of tenderness, a father full of goodness. Therefore, we can and must have immense faith in him.

Jesus shows us God's generosity and care in so many ways: with his words, with his gestures, with his welcome toward everyone, especially toward sinners, the little ones and the poor, as today — the first World Day of the Poor — also reminds us. But he also does so with his admonitions, which show his interest so that we do not pointlessly waste our life. Indeed, it is a sign that God has great esteem for us: this awareness helps us to be responsible people in all our actions. Therefore, the Parable of the Talents reminds us of a personal responsibility and of a faithfulness that even becomes the ability

to continually set out anew, walking new paths, without "burying the talent", that is, the gifts which God has entrusted to us, and for which he will call us to account.

May the Blessed Virgin intercede for us, so that we may remain faithful to the will of God, cultivating the talents that God has given us. Thus we will be helpful to others and, on the last day, we will be welcomed by the Lord, who will invite us to take part in his joy.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- From this parable, it seems that the focus of the master is good stewardship in what the servants have been given. What does it look like in our lives to be faithful stewards over our time, talents and resources?
- One servant buries his "talent" in the ground because he was afraid of disappointing the master. Apart from this fear, why do you think we bury our gifts? What could we do to encourage each other to use our gifts?
- Pope Francis tells us that it was the servants view of God which most impacted how fruitful they were. There are many ways of viewing God: As a harsh judge, loving father, strict disciplinarian, an old wise person in the sky and more. How do you see God? How does your view of God impact how you live?

**PRAYER**

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.