

Fr Tom's homily for the Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Proverbs 31:10-13,19-20,30-31
Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30



A few years ago, I visited the Papal Palace in Castel Gandolfo. There is a museum there and then you get taken around the top floor of the papal rooms at the end. My friends and I listened to everything on the audio guide and looked at all the pictures. Also, there was a woman who just rushed around taking pictures and not stopping to look – never mind listen at what was around. Although she rushed, she had to wait for us to finish, to get to the top floor. The problem was she didn't see the big or even the true picture, she was caught up in her own little world.

It is very easy for us to miss the big picture with today's gospel. We don't understand what a talent is. In some way for us to get the bigger picture, we need to start with that point. It is useful for us to have non-usual terms crop up in the Gospels, such as denarius (a day's wage). In today's parable, a talent is a measure of weight: roughly seventy-five pounds of silver, or the equivalent of 6000 denarii, wages for sixteen and a half years. When we hear 'talent' then, we should not imagine the servant in the parable burying a coin, but going to great lengths to hide an enormous treasure. Nor should we confuse talent with a special skill, as though the servant's hell-meriting sin is to hide his abilities from the world. It is something much more precious which he denies to the world.

The problem with that third servant is that like the woman I mentioned earlier he doesn't see the big picture. He is caught up with his own blinkered view of the world. He is seeing life through a prism of fear. That was his failure. He had the wrong idea of his master. He feared him like a slave. Perhaps he even resented his master for giving him only one talent. And from this self-centred perspective, his life-mission seemed unreasonably demanding. His fear and self-centredness paralysed him and kept him from doing what he was meant to do.

We could ask ourselves the question "Is that how we see God?" Do we view him through a prism of fear? Are we blinded to his generosity? Today's parable is to take that prism away because it is about God's generosity to us and how we allow that to come to fruition in our lives. These 'talents' are nothing less than a share in the very life of God himself, which is granted to each of us through baptism and is nourished in the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church.

This share in God's life is indeed granted more to some than to others –we know that some are extraordinary saints, while many of us find ourselves somewhat less blessed.

But even the least of the children of the Kingdom is greater than the greatest of the Prophets. All of us have been granted something extraordinary.

Our response is essential to that great gift. Even though that gift is the all-powerful Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, yet that life can be petrified, fossilised, by our lack of response to it. We can allow it to transform our lives, and through that transformation to participate in the coming-to-birth of the Kingdom. Or we can allow fear, cowardice and timidity to rule us. God is not a puppet-master. If we will not cooperate with the Spirit, if we listen instead to the voices of fear, to the murmurers who tempt us to give in, to do nothing, God will allow us to do nothing, to dissociate ourselves from the often-hidden but yet inevitable and inexorable spring that is even now overcoming the winter of sin.

We have each been graced in some way by the Lord for the service of others. If we hide what the Lord has given us, others are thereby deprived. Most of us need a bit of encouragement to place the gifts the Lord has given us at the disposal of others. Part of our baptismal calling is to give each other courage, to encourage each other. A few verses beyond where today's second reading ends, Paul calls on the Thessalonians: 'Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing'. That ministry of mutual encouragement is as necessary today as it was in Paul's time, especially when it comes to our following in the way of the Lord. The Lord has entrusted to us the treasure of the gospel. It is not to be hid in the ground out of fear. Rather, we are to share this treasure of the gospel with each other, so that we may all become the person God is calling it to be. As we each try to share that treasure in our own way, we thereby encourage others to do the same. In doing that, then we see the bigger picture.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.