

Homily 33rd Sunday Year A 2023

Speaking about gifts John O'Donoghue writes: *"One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own.*

There are times of great uncertainty in every life. Left alone at such a time, you feel dishevelment and confusion like gravity. When a friend comes with words of encouragement, a light and lightness visit you and you begin to find the stairs and the door out of the dark.

The sense of encouragement you feel from a friend is not simply words or gestures; it is rather a whole presence enfolding you and helping you find the concealed door. The encouraging presence manages to understand you as if in your shoes.

There is no judgment but words of relief and release."

Jesus always wanted to encourage us for our own good and for the glory of God.

Wouldn't it have been great to be present when Jesus told today's parable, seen how others reacted and heard what they had to say about it? The Talent Jesus mentions was not an ability but a sum of money worth a life-times' salary for the majority of people. A reflection on the parable could be on our abilities.

Some people have a very special and outstanding ability envied by many, especially in music, art or theatre. However gifted, an individual is rarely, if ever, gifted in every area of life. No matter how good they are, they still depend on others in lots of other ways.

All our gifts are God-given and often find their best expression when used in service. A celebrity pianist enjoys playing for others and the inspiration and uplift they bring; they themselves are equally uplifted and happy too. The use of our gifts in this way is also an expression of thanks, of gratitude to God, for God's gift to us.

In his letter Peter writes: *"everyone should use their gifts to serve others, as good managers of the varied graces of God."* (4:10)

Jesus reminds us that any gift left unopened or disregarded is useless. We are encouraged to use them to bless and minister to others, to use our gifts as a blessing and an encouragement to them. Paul adds this important advice 1 Cor 13:1-3, *"If I have all the gifts but do not have love, I am nothing."* Conceit, pride, and selfish motives will cancel out the blessing your gifts are meant to be. We can use them to encourage, build-up, strengthen, equip, and edify, using them to promote the interests of others rather than our own.

*Deep within your soul
there is a knowing place
a sanctuary where gifts are nurtured.
Enter that sacred space.
Spend time there tending your gifts.
There in the chapel of your heart
you will become a gift to be given.* Macrina Wiederkehr

We can use our gift(s) as a bridge.

There are times in life

when we are called to be bridges,
not a great monument spanning a distance
and carrying loads of heavy traffic,
but a simple bridge to help one person from here to there
over some difficulty
such as pain, grief, fear, loneliness,
a bridge which opens the way
for an ongoing journey.

Becoming a bridge for another,
will bring us a blessing,
allowing us to escape from the small prison of self
and exist for the wider world,
breaking out to be a larger being
who can enter another's pain
and rejoice in another's triumph.
There is only one greater blessing
in this life, and that is,
to allow someone else
to be a bridge for you.

Joy Cowley, Aotearoa Psalms, New Zealand

There was a slightly long bridge, wide enough for only one car. One day, two cars tried to cross over from opposite directions and met at the middle of the bridge, obviously unable to pass each other.....

One driver poked his head out of his window and yelled - *"I don't make way for idiots!"*
The second chap rolled his window down and yelled back - *"I do!"* and backed up his car...