

33rd Sunday A

To understand this particular parable, we need a proper understanding of the word talent.

First century Jews had a different understanding of the word “talent.” In Jesus’ day, a talent was a measure of weight, like an ounce, or a pound. A talent was thought to be the amount of weight that a full grown man could comfortably carry on his back.

But the word “talent” also came to be known as a certain sum of money, like dollars. Two thousand years ago, a talent was the equivalent of what a person could earn in 15-38 years, depending on what commentary one reads. A talent was a lot of money, and five talents was a ton of money, perhaps literally, a ton of money.

Finally, the word “talent” in our language has come to mean a skill, or ability. In fact, our definition of this word has been derived from this very parable. If someone has a gift, or an ability that has worldly value – like the ability to sculpt, or the ability to make music, or the ability to sell magazine subscriptions – we call that ability a “talent.” Talents in the first century – and talents today – are intended to be used, not buried.

You’ll be glad to know that this is not a homily about stewardship, as important as it is to the life of the Christian and to the vitality of our parishes.

The Parable of the Talents isn't really about money **or** ability. It's about something even more important. It's about the

- enormous, radical generosity of our God.
- It's about the paralyzing effect of fear, and
- it is about trust.

(SHORT PAUSE)

The story opens with acts of trust and generosity. The master is about to leave town on a journey. He entrusts his wealth to three servants. Each is given a different sum of money, yet each is given a big amount –

remember: even one talent was a very generous figure.

It should be **clear** that the master **trusts each one** of his servants. He even hands over the money without.... Any..... instructions.

(SHORT PAUSE)

Yetthis is a parable that makes us very uncomfortable in our perceptions of God.

If the master in this parable is to represent the returning Jesus, he seems hurtful, arbitrary and even somewhat corrupt.

Yet.....we see....

It is the **behavior** of the **last servant** that elicits the scornful response of the Master.

He calls the master a hard man, who expects returns from his investment, and he uses **fear** as his defense. The tragic flaw of the one-talent man is that he lived out of fear and distrust..... even when greatly gifted and completely trusted.

(PAUSE)

By comparison the five and two talent servants were different. They were both **inspired** and **motivated** by the trust and generosity of the Master. And in their **response** to that **act of trusting**.....they are invited to share the Master's joy.

I have trusted you and you lived up to that trust!

Come!..... Share My Joy!

These are hardly the actions or the words of a harsh or hard Master!

Still, the third man saw the Master through **untrusting eyes**, a distorted view even when faced with a magnificent and liberal exhibition of trust.

(PAUSE)

Before we are tempted to think **too poorly** of this unfortunate servant, it is good to keep in mind that **trusting** can be a difficult thing for any of us.

It's easier to identify with the third servant because we indeed have acted (or, not acted) out of fear.

This is the deeper reason we are uncomfortable with this parable. We know what it means to fear. We know, all-too-well, what it means to not trust

(PAUSE)

I am willing to bet that **fear**,

Our own fears of rejection.....

Fears of what people might think of us.....

Our terror at being vulnerable

And most especially, and without a doubt our deep dark dread of failure.....

These..... have caused us to mistrust, or at least not trust completely those whom deserve and have certainly earned our trust.

Our spouses.

Our dearest friends....

our God.

And the Master's joy cannot be found here.

Fear and distrust.

These are two aspects of our frail humanity that our God addresses in word and deed.

The tender exhortation, "Be not afraid" occurs 62 times in Scripture; "Fear not" appears 96 times.

Nearly every miracle, almost every conversation with Jesus in scripture is covered in trust, they are meant to elicit trust.

Trust over fear is of paramount importance.

As Deacon's, and yes, Deacon's wives, you **will be** viewed as a person that can be trusted, and, as you already know, that means much more than just keeping a confidence.

How you handle this trust, how you model trust, can have a profound effect on people's perceptions of not only you, but of the Church and even of God. **That's huge.** This is one of the **risks** of the call to Holy Orders.

It is imperative that we learn to develop a deep sense of **and** an active **trust** in God, as that is our greatest resource in serving His people. In fact, sometimes, it's all we've got.

How we learn to do this is as individual as....are.....our.... deepest fears.

We are powerless to expel them. They must be cast out by He who is the Light that dispels all that is darkness.

The first step is an **act** of trust.

The first step is to risk some part...of.... Ourselves... to the mercy of God.

(LONGER PAUSE)

In tonight's Gospel, St. Matthew is urging his community not to be timid and fearful, but to **take risks**.

(LONG PAUSE)

In my own experience of Diaconate, I do have regrets. I regret all of the should-haves, could-haves and why-didn't-I's.

I lament all those times when I stopped short, the times I didn't give my core best. The times I held back for fear of running out.

But.... I..... have..... NEVER.....regretted a time when I gave just a bit more than I was comfortable with, when I became a bit more vulnerable, when I trusted God just a little more than I did the last time.

(PAUSE)

We are to be the Example of God's love to all, but especially to the poor, the hungry and the marginalized. It's a big responsibility. It sometimes involves great risk and a giant step outside our comfort zones. And there are times when the task seems monumental. But we are not left to flounder. We are gifted, empowered, indeed we are "Christed" in the Sacraments.

And we are not left without example.

Notice that the five and two talent servants are not praised for their resourcefulness, or their wisdom. Their success was likely due to their ability to **do** as they had seen their Master **do**. To **be** what they see their Master to **be**.

Their triumph in acting in his example might be **more the source** of the Master's joy than was the doubling of his estate.

(MEDIUM PAUSE)

Listen, what God requires of us is not success, but **faithfulness** in action, thought and fervor.

Don't worry. We will fail often enough. But with each failure comes the opportunity for victory.

Sometimes.... though rarely....the victories will be epic.

Most of them will be small, baby-steps in dying to our fears, sacrificing bits of our deeper darkness, taking risks and learning to trust in the one who risked all.

(PAUSE)

Trust.

Real and abiding trust.

Trust born of risks that are not for the faint-of-heart.

In that enduring and restful and often **exhilarating** trust, we do enter into the Master's joy. What greater gift can we ask for... this side of Heaven?