

The Thirty Third Sunday of the Year.

A talent, which was the unit of money used in today's Gospel, was an awful lot of money. Some have worked out that it might have been equivalent to 15 years worth of wages. Why did the man give so much money to his servants? Simply because he knew them, he trusted them and, in two cases his judgment was excellent. Even in the case of the third servant, he knew not to entrust him with more than the others. He knew his servants and perhaps he also knew that fear in one servant might limit his potential or restrict its development altogether.

Elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus says that the person who can be trusted with money will be trusted with even greater things, so what on earth can he mean?

Like all parables, this one brings with it an invitation to go deeper into its meaning. So, let's not get stuck on the money, how much it might be worth or on the seeming hardness and unfairness of the man who was the master of the slaves and the owner of the property. The parable brings an opportunity to delve deeply into our responsibilities as the baptized workers for the Kingdom, which gives us the responsibility to make of our lives the time and place where the work and presence of Jesus is recognizable and active.

The parable provides a good starting point for us as Christians from two points of view. First and foremost, the talents or money they have to use are given by the landowner who is still the owner. Secondly, while two of them put the money to work through investment they, as we know only too well from present economic experience have no direct control over the growth of the investment, that too is a gift.

Each of us is given a different set of gifts rather like the servants received different amounts from the absentee landowner. We know too that we are given exactly what we need to live our lives as disciples as we journey towards the "Day of the Lord" as Paul describes it, when we shall rise into the life of God and be filled with his joy and fulfillment. This makes us stewards of everything that we have. In our own time, there is a temptation and tendency to believe that everything I have, whether wealth, health, personal attributes, skills, education, status, relationships and even creation itself is mine by right because I have worked for it; deserve it or it goes with my status. This is not how the disciple of Jesus sees gifts, possessions and personal attributes. No,

everything is a gift from God given to us for a purpose. The gift is given and remains God's always and it is ours to use for his glory and not our own.

Stewardship means that we see everything as gift that is why what we are doing now is so crucial. Celebrating the Eucharist is about giving thanks to God, which as well as expressing our gratitude, helps us to see more deeply the implications of receiving so many gifts.

And the key implication is to respect the giver by using the gifts according to his mind and purpose. That is why it is so important to listen to his message in the scriptures and to have minds shaped by the teaching of the Church. The responsibility that follows is, therefore, to use our gifts and talents as Jesus did and inspires us to do. Wealth, for example, has to be used in love for the service and flourishing of those whom the Lord has given us and for whom we want to care. Health is given us so that we might enter with full energy into the pattern and style of life that is ours and into the web of relationships of which we are part always guided by the kind of love that Jesus has for us. And then there are all the possessions which belong to us, or which are loaned by God to be held in stewardship. Are we like the man in the Gospel who built bigger barns to house all his possessions to accumulate them for himself or are we ready to use them in service of the kingdom.

In an age feverishly concerned with investments and the income which does, or does not follow, the type of investment that today's Gospel teaches is about putting all our energies and gifts into the service of justice, love and peace. Just as the two servants received a great reward for their efforts so shall we. Not in financial reward but in the happiness and prosperity that our psalm describes. The more we give ourselves in love and sacrifice, without consideration of reward, the more we will draw close to God's gift of fulfillment and joy to the full. The investment of stocks and shares, gilts and government bonds is made in the hope of financial reward. The investment that Jesus invites is the way to complete and perfect human life. Restored and renewed, for ourselves, those whom we love and the whole of humanity in fact.