

Homily by Fr. Anthony Davis

“Blessed are those who fear the Lord.” -Ps. 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

November 15, 2020

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

Prov 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1Thess 5:1-6; Mt 25:14-15, 19-21

To fear, or not to fear—that appears to be the question, after an initial glance at today’s readings. The responsorial psalm proclaims, “Blessed are those who fear the Lord.” Such fear is obviously a positive thing. But in the gospel reading, the third servant “out of fear” hides the gift entrusted to him. And because he does so, he is severely reprimanded by his master. In this case, fear leads to the servant losing everything. It is obviously something negative.

So how do we make sense of this tension? A key to understanding Matthew’s version of the parable of the talents is to pay careful attention to what is said about the “master,” who represents Jesus, the glorious Son of Man. During the time of the master’s journey—that is, between Jesus’ ascension and second coming—he entrusts his servants with gifts. That act of entrustment extends today to us, his disciples. Indeed, the master is extravagantly generous in his bestowal. Notice, too, that he is discerning, for he calibrates gifts according to capacities and ability (that is, he knows each one of us, his servants, intimately).

So, what is the proper response to this loving, generous, and empowering Lord? The first two servants exemplify such a response. They gladly and earnestly go about their business, producing an abundance of works of love and mercy—this is what “talents” mean in connection with the servants’ productivity. So like the woman of the 1st. reading, who symbolizes those who have imbibed the wisdom taught in Proverbs, they reach out their hands to the poor and extend their arms to the needy, as they strive to love and please the Lord in all things. This response is a manifestation of the “fear of the Lord” that is praised throughout the Bible. Such “fear” is, in actuality, awe and reverence before the God who is so gracious and merciful to us, that lead each one of us to ask: How can I respond, today, in the concrete circumstances of my life, to such a gracious Lord? That is what “Talent of Treasure” means.

An improper response is also, ironically, a kind of fear, which is exhibited by the third servant. As a result, burdened with a false image of the Lord, this third servant turns in on himself, and buries his gift, thereby hiding his light under a bushel basket.

There are many things today that can cause us anxiety and fear: diminishment and old age; health care and sickness; finances and job insecurity; concern for loved ones; etc. Moreover, we are deluged/overwhelmed daily by local, national, and international news stories that evoke

alarm. Our world seems to become less safe and secure with each passing day. Even more, then, do we need to turn to the Lord, to the one who cares intimately for each one of us, who is lavishly generous, who wants us to have life in abundance. In the face of such a loving God, we need not cower in fear (as did the third servant).

The essence of the parable seems to lie in the servants' conception of responsibility. Each servant entrusted with the master's money was faithful up to a certain point. The servant who buried the master's money was irresponsible. One can bury seeds in the ground and expect them to become productive because they obey natural laws. Coins, however, do not obey natural laws. They obey economic laws and become productive in circulation. Hence, God rewards those who use their gifts for serving him and the good of others.

What do coins, and the law of economics have to do with the kingdom of God? The Lord entrusts the subjects of his kingdom with gifts and graces and he gives his subjects the freedom to use them as they think best. With each gift and talent, God gives sufficient means (grace and wisdom) for using them in a fitting way. As the parable of the talents shows, God abhors indifference and an attitude that says it is not worth trying. God honors those who use their talents and gifts for doing good. Those who are faithful with even a little are entrusted with more! But those who neglect or squander what God has entrusted to them will lose what they have.

Therefore, the important lesson here for us today, is no one can stand still for long in the Christian life. We either get more or we lose what we have. We either advance towards God or we slip back. Do you seek to serve God with the gifts, talents, and graces he has given to you?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, be the ruler of my heart and thoughts, be the king of my home and relationships, and be the master of my work and service. Help me to make good use of the gifts, talents, time, and resources you give me for your glory and your kingdom.