**THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS Matt. 25: 14-30**

We have just heard one of the most interesting and challenging of Christ’s parables in the gospels in that it has many facets to its message which are relevant to how we should live our life in Christ. It is worth looking at some of these briefly as even a cursory examination reveals much of value in spiritual terms.

Firstly, the divine act of giving talents to mankind comes with the command to work hard and achieve success in what we do, to the glory of God and for the benefit of creation. We have been entrusted with the property of another in his absence and in order to be his good and faithful servants we are duty bound to invest what is his and return it to our master with interest. From one perspective we might say that as God’s servants this is our purpose in life and if successful we will be rewarded for our efforts with further and greater responsibility as the servants with five and two talents in the parable.

Perhaps at this point we might sympathise with the person who has one talent, for being branded as ‘wicked and lazy’ since what he has been given is less than the other two. But the backdrop that Christ depicts certainly matches reality in that when we look around us some people appear to have a much greater array of talents than others, even when we take into consideration those ‘hidden talents’ at which we marvel when they come to light. There are some extraordinary natural gifts out there in so many walks of life, sport, intellectual and humanitarian pursuits, but they cannot be compared. There is no equality in the distribution rather Christ in the parable distributes the talents to each according to his ability. The person who has two talents needs to expend as much effort to make another two as the person who makes five. St Paul reinforces these natural differences when he speaks about the Church as the body of Christ. He points out that some parts of the body are visible and clearly more practically useful than others but others, sometimes not visible like what he calls the unseemly parts, are crucially important for mankind. They cannot operate independently of the other bodily parts since they are all necessary for the unity and successful operation of the body. Likewise, he says that in the Church there is a kind of hierarchy starting with apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles etc. but all are important for the harmony of the Body of Christ, without which the Church cannot function successfully. Perhaps we see the truth of this more clearly demonstrated in the insect world especially that of bees where each member of the hive knows its role and its responsibilities and like the drones happily expire when their task is finished. However, he ends his discussion on the Body with an instruction to “earnestly desire the higher gifts”.

In the parable the talents are given by the master and they remain his possession throughout. They are not the property of the individuals who receive them. They are stewards not owners. They are given as a loan which has to be paid back. In the creation story Adam and Eve are given mastery of the creation with the order “till the earth and subdue it”. They are given the responsibility of naming everything and making it work for the benefit of the created order and those who live in it. Like those in the parable we are tasked with using our talents to make more not for ourselves but for our master, the author of creation and saviour of the world. As is so evident in the societies of the world today we have lost the vision of the task ahead of us especially when we look at the world from an ecological and economic standpoint.

Another important aspect of the parable is that we are called to account for how we have used those gifts given to us by God in whatever form and to whatever degree we have them. We work at different paces depending on the inner resources which have been given us but we are all called upon to work to the measure which has been given us. One talent should be working as hard for his one talent as the person with two or five. We are held accountable for what we have made of the talent given us because it is intended primarily to benefit the world, others, not ourselves, though we share in any success which our efforts produce. As parents and grandparents we can look at our world with horror at what previous generations have bequeathed us and what we have left for those coming after us. Young people savagely and brutally attacking and killing a young girl with serious psychological problems and a young baby being abandoned in a bin by her parents in the last fortnight amongst other tragedies. What defence will we offer when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ and he asks us how we have used our gifts for the benefit of His world for which He gave His life. How great is the need for qualified professionals who are able to treat these problems.

Talents are concrete proof of God’s provision for us. We have all been given by God’s grace the resources we need to work with. The hard part can often be discovering and exploiting them. Even when we are deprived of our talents through injury or tragedy, it is often remarkable how other gifts appear. It is utterly amazing in the world of sport for example to see those who have lost limbs or faculties like vision compete and perform in Paralympic games to a level which seems impossible and almost difficult to comprehend.

There is nothing more inspiring than seeing somebody with an outstanding talent using it for the benefit of others. The person himself or herself seems totally fulfilled and the audience are no less in raptures at what they are perceiving and receiving. We could cite examples from the arts, music, painting, sport. But we too have the talents to inspire those around us in a greater or lesser way according to the measure of the gifts given us and thus to earn the approval of our master who gave us them. Let us ‘cast our bread upon the waters,” as the verse from Ecclesiastes says, and with God’s help see how our efforts are blessed.

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