



The Holy See

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

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[Multimedia]

The parable we have just listened to has a beginning, a middle and an end, which shed light on the beginning, the middle and the end of our lives.

The beginning. Everything begins with *a great good*. The master does not keep his wealth to himself, but gives it to his servants; five talents to one, two to another, one to a third, “to each according to his ability” (*Mt 25:15*). It has been calculated that a single talent was equivalent to the income of some twenty years’ work: it was of enormous value, and would be sufficient for a lifetime. This is the beginning. For us too, everything began with the *grace* of God – everything always begins with grace, not with our own efforts – with the grace of God, who is a Father and has given us so many good things, entrusting different talents to each of us. We possess a great wealth that depends not on what we possess but on what we are: the life we have received, the good within us, the indelible beauty God has given us by making us in his image... All these things make each of us precious in his eyes, each one of us is priceless and unique in history! This is how God looks at us, how God feels towards us.

We need to remember this. All too often, when we look at our lives, we see only the things we lack, and we complain about what we lack. We then yield to the temptation to say: “If only...!” If only I had that job, if only I had that home, if only I had money and success, if only I didn’t have

this or that problem, if only I had better people around me...! But those illusory words – if only! – prevent us from seeing the good all around us. They make us forget the talents we possess. You may not have *that*, but you do have *this*, and the “if only” makes us forget this. Yet God gave those talents to us because he knows each of us and he knows our abilities. He trusts us, despite our weaknesses. God even trusts the servant who will hide his talent, hoping that despite his fears, he too will put to good use what he received. In a word, the Lord asks us to make the most of the present moment, not yearning for the past, but waiting industriously for his return. How ugly is that nostalgia, which is like a black mood poisoning our soul and making us always look backwards, always at others, but never at our own hands or at the opportunities for work that the Lord has given us, never at our own situation... not even at our own poverty.

This brings us to the *centre* of the parable: the work of the servants, which is *service*. Service is our work too; it makes our talents bear fruit and it gives meaning to our lives. Those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. We must repeat this, and repeat it often: those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. We should reflect on this: those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. But what kind of service are we speaking of? In the Gospel, good servants are those who *take risks*. They are not fearful and overcautious, they do not cling to what they possess, but put it to good use. For if goodness is not invested, it is lost, and the grandeur of our lives is not measured by how much we save but by the fruit we bear. How many people spend their lives simply accumulating possessions, concerned only about the *good life* and not the *good they can do*. Yet how empty is a life centred on *our needs* and blind to the *needs of others*! The reason we *have* gifts is so that we can *be* gifts for others. And here, brothers and sisters, we should ask ourselves the question: do I only follow my own needs, or am I able to look to the needs of others, to whoever is in need? Are my hands open, or are they closed?

It is significant that fully four times those servants who invested their talents, who took a risk, are called “*faithful*” (vv. 21, 23). For the Gospel, faithfulness is never risk-free. “But, father, does being a Christian mean taking risks?” – “Yes, dearly beloved, take a risk. If you do not take risks, you will end up like the third [servant]: burying your abilities, your spiritual and material riches, everything”. Taking risks: there is no faithfulness without risk. Fidelity to God means handing over our life, letting our carefully laid plans be disrupted by our need to serve. “But I have my plans, and if I have to serve...”. Let your plans be upset, go and serve. It is sad when Christians play a defensive game, content only to observe rules and obey commandments. Those “moderate” Christians who never go beyond boundaries, never, because they are afraid of risk. And those, allow me this image, those who take care of themselves to avoid risk begin in their lives a process of mummification of their souls, and they end up as mummies. Following rules is not enough; fidelity to Jesus is not just about not making mistakes, this is quite wrong. That is what the lazy servant in the parable thought: for lack of initiative and creativity, he yielded to needless fear and buried the talent he had received. The master actually calls him “wicked” (v. 26). And yet he did nothing wrong! But he did nothing good either. He preferred to sin by omission rather than to risk making a mistake. He was not faithful to God, who spends freely, and he made his offence even worse by

returning the gift he had received. “You gave me this, and I give it to you”, nothing more. The Lord, for his part, asks us to be generous, to conquer fear with the courage of love, to overcome the passivity that becomes complicity. Today, in these times of uncertainty, in these times of instability, let us not waste our lives thinking only of ourselves, indifferent to others, or deluding ourselves into thinking: “peace and security!” (*1 Thess 5:3*). Saint Paul invites us to look reality in the face and to avoid the infection of indifference.

How then do we serve, as God would have us serve? The master tells the faithless servant: “You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest” (v. 27). Who are the “bankers” who can provide us with long-term interest? They are the *poor*. Do not forget: the poor are at the heart of the Gospel; we cannot understand the Gospel without the poor. The poor are like Jesus himself, who, though rich, emptied himself, made himself poor, even taking sin upon himself: the worst kind of poverty. The poor guarantee us an eternal income. Even now they help us become rich in love. For the worst kind of poverty needing to be combatted is our poverty of love. The worst kind of poverty needing to be combatted is our poverty of love. The Book of Proverbs praises the woman who is rich in love, whose value is greater than that of pearls. We are told to imitate that woman who “opens her hand to the poor” (*Prov 31:20*): that is the great richness of this woman. Hold out your hand to the poor, instead of demanding what you lack. In this way, you will multiply the talents you have received.

The season of Christmas is approaching, the holiday season. How often do we hear people ask: “What can I buy? What more can I have? I must go shopping”. Let us use different words: “What can I give to others?”, in order to be like Jesus, who gave of himself and was born in the manger”.

We now come to the *end* of the parable. Some will be wealthy, while others, who had plenty and wasted their lives, will be poor (cf. v. 29). At the end of our lives, then, the truth will be revealed. The pretence of this world will fade, with its notion that success, power and money give life meaning, whereas love – the love we have given – will be revealed as true riches. Those things will fall, yet love will emerge. A great Father of the Church wrote: “As for this life, when death comes and the theatre is deserted, when all remove their masks of wealth or of poverty and depart hence, judged only by their works, they will be seen for what they are: some truly rich, others poor” (SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Poor Man Lazarus*, II, 3). If we do not want to live life poorly, let us ask for the grace to see Jesus in the poor, to serve Jesus in the poor.

I would like to thank all those faithful servants of God who quietly live in this way, serving others. I think, for example, of Father Roberto Malgesini. This priest was not interested in theories; he simply saw Jesus in the poor and found meaning in life in serving them. He dried their tears with his gentleness, in the name of God who consoles. The *beginning* of his day was prayer, to receive God’s gifts; the *centre* of his day was charity, to make the love he had received bear fruit; the *end* was his clear witness to the Gospel. This man realized that he had to stretch out his hand to all

those poor people he met daily, for he saw Jesus in each of them. Brothers and sisters, let us ask for the grace to be Christians not in word, but in deed. To bear fruit, as Jesus desires. May this truly be so.