

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 33rd Sunday Ordinary Year

Use it or lose it. On one level, our gospel today has such a straightforward and ready-made message. Whatever we have been given and entrusted with, we are in charge of caring for and maintaining. If we are not actively working it, then it may already be slipping away from us anyway. Storage specialists preach such a 'decluttering' message to us all the time, "If you haven't used it in the past year, then it's a loss, so toss it." Whether that is an extra kitchen appliance, you either have to find a place to store (even if in a garage) or the device lays around on the countertop making the bar look like a flea market, if it isn't used enough to keep dust off of it, then it is probably lost to you already. I have to confess, that more than once I am that way with books, as I run across so interesting a book, and buy it, only to start reading it and have the insight, "Wait, I've heard this before, and look on my shelf & I have that very book!" *That may happen more than I want to admit!*

So on one level, today's parable gives that message right up front to us: **Use it or lose it.** It is amazing what not exercising some talent can do to retire our skill. I'm told by a physical therapist that our muscle mass can begin to atrophy in as little as two-three days; and that for every one day down over time, it may take three days to rebuild previous level of muscle and movement. I'm sure if you've had to wear a cast or immobilizing brace after a break or sprain, you noticed the muscle weakness in that part's complementary arm or leg.

So, most simply, Jesus is telling us that if we do not utilize a gift that we have been given, it may soon be lost to us. The man with five talents, the man with two talents, they put their gifts to work and they grew. But the man with one talent hid his one talent away, and it is lost to him. So, Jesus is challenging us not to waste what we have been given; put it to use. It may be spent-used up, but may also be increased - a lot more variables get involved - but **for sure to diminish or decrease it**- just hide it away and it is as good as gone. So, Jesus wants us to inventory today what God has entrusted to us, and we must utilize and exercise it for it to grow and multiply.

But I find Jesus teaching a deeper truth also with this same parable. Parables (like all scripture) can have multiple levels of simultaneous meaning and truth – St Augustine calls it a 'plurality of meaning in scripture' having one literal sense and three spiritual senses of meaning (allegorical, moral & anagogical-future oriented). So, I find Jesus teaching through this parable, a spiritual sense to

scripture advising us to not fixate only on material growth or gain. The parable is not merely about multiplying one's wealth portfolio, but it is about investing in what really lasts and what you can really rely on when you are down. It is not any amount of coins or warehouses of stuff. The real treasure to increase and our eternally valuable riches amount to our **human relationships**. On this spiritual level, when I hear this parable, I am at first broken hearted at the bankruptcy of every one of the servants entrusted with talents. Talk about sharks or dog eat dog, they serve the same master but have no consideration or regard for each other. It is as if they are operating in their own little worlds (& who taught them that). I suggest that what Jesus is teaching through this parable is the importance of working with others and building stronger ties/relations to our fellow disciples. Instead of racing to see how fast we can double the actual currency we've been given, what about a little more investment in one another- how is my co-worker doing. My starting point in considering this spiritual level, stems from the fact that the man given five talents and the man given two, they had to take note (be aware) of the meager one talent given to the last fellow. Couldn't they have offered to bring him into their project, to pool their resources to make an even greater/safer investment together? Or at least offered their strategy of investing, "Hey, I hear there's a fish shortage up north, so make some catches and transport shipments up there, they will pay premium." Or "Try renting out the bosses' wheel barrows, subcontract them to the Roman Road Dept, I hear they are behind schedule on the road construction and have to get it done before winter." Could they have passed along a 'lead', 'tip' or two (obviously they are good at it)? Couldn't they have worked better together? And not just the servants, but I want to hold the master to account too. What is the deal with the 'fear' the servant feels toward him – he says the boss is 'demanding'? He even adds that the boss 'harvests what he doesn't sow' (isn't that theft?). I don't find the owner-boss to be very wise & business-savvy, for if he truly harvests where he didn't sow, he would not have discarded the poor little one talent guy so quickly (he at least got his principal back) – why throw him away (isn't throwing him out kind of like 'burying your worker' – not even trying to invest in your worker?) A good conservative investing strategy has its place (diversify your portfolio, right). Keep him around – after this episode, that one talent servant may become his hardest worker (learn from his mistake & become the ranch's best asset) – maybe not in

finance, but maybe managing the feed stock for the sheep-flock. He may have missed opportunities but his safe approach didn't completely lose investment. So, I find a lack of cooperation and consideration for one another all throughout this parable. ***They all need to work on investing in one another*** – that true mutual fund in one another will be a true treasure going forward. Similar to the catchy marketing slogan in that national TV commercial series for a money manager firm that goes “We do better when our customers do better”. Invested in each other's success. Or another slogan, from a trucking company, that goes, “Our product is our people - The driving force of our company). What needs work in this parable is building better relationships and supportive connections between them all. Might the poor little guy, have approached the owner and expressed his fears first, at least to confirm that any investment will be an acceptable risk to the owner – confirming that the owner wants bold initiative first, and can live with the risk of total loss. Might the little guy have even stroked the ego of the owner (bosses for you), by asking him some investing advice based on his proven success? Or might he have turned to the other investors and ask to join in their endeavors. What one can't do, they could throw in with another and together, their pull would be stronger in the market. We should invest in one another. It is the person involved, not any profit that is the priority.

I'm reminded of the story of St Lawrence deacon, who after his Pope Sixtus was killed by the emperor, the emperor demanded all the treasure of the church to be brought to him the next morning. If not, then Deacon Lawrence would also be killed. So that night, St Lawrence distributed all of the church funds to the poor of the city, and the next morning, he walked to the emperor's palace. The church members walked behind him in solidarity, and when the emperor demanded the church's riches, Deacon Lawrence stretched out his hands gesturing to the people and said, “Here is the Church's Treasure!” Of course, the emperor was furious and had him martyred, but St Lawrence taught by that action that the true wealth of the kingdom is the bond and links between its members: the spiritual relationship to each other- A bond that is never lost or diminished in value. Priceless!