

## St Pius-St Anthony 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

I love listening to rabbinic disputes or tangles over interpretation. Hebrew rabbis have a reputation of coming at a text or law from all directions, to draw every bit of meaning from them. I've heard that if you ask two rabbis their opinion, you get three. I feel that way about today's parable. The master-owner's side, the fearful servant's side and my own take. I like the story of the arbitrator-mediator who was called into settle a property dispute. One guy claimed it and said the land is ours, it's been in my family's possession for years and years, here are pictures of my ancestors living in houses on it from way back". The judge said, "Hmm, inheritance claim, you have a good point'. Then the other guy said, "No, my family bought it and took it on and have been cultivated it-harvesting on it for three generations, here are receipts of years fertilizer invested & crop sales.." Judge said, "Hmm, use/possession claim, you have a good point.' To which a third guy listening in, stood up and said, "Hold On. Both can't be right, 'You said he had case AND he had a case. That can't be." To which the judge said, "You are right. You have a case too!" Okay, but what do we end up with?

I feel that way about this parable, so I ask you, "Hearing it all, who do you have more feeling for (positive or negative)?" You might have both—like yes the master is entitled to more effort from the servant, but there are always risks with money and the servant did his fearful best, I guess. Do you react to this parable, saying, "Yes, that's justice" or "Aw, hold on, that is a bit much"?

The master called the servant 'wicked lazy'. Wait ,I say. He at least safeguarded the money-buried in a hole but it was safe. The servant could have gone on a bender-eating and drinking it up like the prodigal son did. The servant remained faithful on the job site. He didn't make bundles and bundles of more cash for the master. Maybe he could have done more, but he didn't lose anything. So considering the boss' own testimony agreeing with that servant about his own ruthless business practices, that servant knew the boss was demanding, often claiming what wasn't his-the boss agreed with that. So, what was the little servant's reaction to being cast out? By the way, the parable doesn't say. For example, after he was expelled from the compound, did he wail and gnash teeth-which is what the owner said happened outside his gates- I guess he is arrogantly saying, that is how the other half lives, but we remember that the boss is coming from a pretty gilded-luxurious side of things). But a good question is "How does the thrown-out servant feel now?" I wonder that since he had been living in such fear, and dreaded the boss so badly, when cut loose, this servant may have stepped outside the wall and said, "Free at last, free at last, Thank God Almighty I'm free at last." Better to be poor and free than to be rich and a slave to another. Viewing it that way, such a simple act of burying money, may've been his wisest way to gain release from a cruel master. So, I want us all to ask ourselves,

considering the characters in this parable; who do you react most strongly to? Or who do you have more feeling for in the end?

I am curious about the culpability of the owner here-this servant has surely worked with him for a while, as he trusts him enough to turn over even the one talent to him. But maybe considering the disparity in distributions, (five, two and one), did he not set up a self-fulfilling prophecy by only giving a meager one talent to him? And what does the owner do, but make these distributions and then goes off on an indeterminately timed journey (say the little guy did go to a bank, what if the owner came back before the Bank CD matured-got nothing then) so by him running off like that, he almost abandons them. But, yes, I also fault the ejected servant for not speaking up sooner (to be so afraid, he was courageously honest with him-Who tells a boss he's a thief!) But the little guy could've asked for a minute from the owner to consult about conservative investments or some insider business contacts before he ran off. This brings up for me the real tragedy in this parable. It's the lack of personal respect and mutuality between everyone. The owner and the servants, and the servants between themselves. Imagine how this could have happened. The owner has considerable wealth & resources. The proof is that he leaves all this money with his servants-and then goes on some journey. For example, what else pays his expenses on this new journey venture? He had to have a lot more operating capital. I think he was exploring new business himself, exotic overseas investing-new trading partners-new markets, so he obviously has so much to work with. Could he not have had a sit-down seminar with the servants and advising how he sees the political winds blowing-what his other powerful business owner friends see ahead; like what's next big product or new demand in the city. Maybe he could even drop some contact names or call-back numbers of past loose end deals that could become useful now. Here is my biggest issue with him: Why didn't he encourage more team-play between the servants; imagine if the servants pooled their talents, creating a co-op. Certainly it would have given more opportunity to the little guy with only one talent? But we hear of none of this relationship building from the owner. That is the tragedy. I think Jesus is saying a lot with this parable. Yes, he is saying about our own gifts or resources, "Use them or lose them." He does intend a wake-up call for us, to not take for granted any blessing or gift/talent God has entrusted to us. And by the drama of the man's ejection from the estate, Jesus is saying to us 'Don't take your blessings for granted-learn while you can-don't let grass grow under you or soon it will be growing over you.' It is good to note that this parable is in the middle of another set of three presented by Matthew: Last week's ten bridesmaids, this parable of talents and judgment, and next week we will hear about the separation and judgement between sheep-good and goats-bad. All three parables preach against veggiing away, wasting time and being caught off guard-deadbeat. Our final judgement will surprise us. Count on it now, that the end will come when we are not ready. So stay alert, don't sleep on buried investments. But also on a

deeper level, I hear Jesus saying we have to be better about building relationships in the kingdom of God. I wonder why the owner did not better invest in his people and teaming them, than he did in his money and capital. So, Jesus is saying that in the Kingdom of God, "Network, network, network." Reach out and speak up to each other. We can do more, both invest and gain more, & absorb and remedy loss easier when we are working on the estate together under the master. The servants needed to turn to each other and cooperate in their plans for the king. Again, I see these three parables together, last week with the bridesmaids, had they noticed sooner the lack of extra bottles of oil with their friends, they could have made a quick run to fill all the bottles up before the groom arrived. At that point it was too late. So then, this parable comes along and warns the workers, "Team up now, pool resources now, to increase the master's investment before he returns from the trip". And then with next week's parable, we won't have the surprise of both the goats and sheep who have to ask, "When did we do things or not do things for you king-master?" In that parable, remember that the king says, 'What you did for the least brother sister you did for me.' So that last parable culminates in a teaming up of personnel resources ahead of time- the investing of brothers and sisters in each other to get ready for the king and master's return. Jesus is telling us His disciples to be ready better for the end and His return by acting like fellow subjects in His Kingdom. We are not the only ones; we will be judged by how many more are with us! He invested in us; so how are we working his investment and will we return this investment with the increase gain of more souls along with us for Him? That will be our judgement.