

Everybody knows this story; the parable of the talents. It seems like one of the easiest parables to understand and we've all been told in many sermons and homilies to use the gifts God gave us, so that we may enter into the joy of the master.

But that's too easy if we just say "use our gifts" and don't think about this lesson more deeply

Let's start by looking at what was a talent? In Jesus' time it was a measure of weight, and it was used as currency because it meant a big bar of silver. The way we use the word talent didn't come into being until the middle ages, when people started to use this word that they heard in the gospel to mean all the things that God has given us to use.

Pope Francis says in his homily that while the world uses the word "talent" to mean a distinct individual talent – for example, in music, in sports, it should mean more than that for Christians today.

But historically what was a talent, actually. Well a talent is about 65 pounds of silver, that would be worth about \$20,000 dollars in today's market. So that's a lot!

But we need to think of the value of a talent in those times to really understand how big it was. In Jesus' time a labourer would make a denarius a day, or about a pound and a half of silver in a year, working 6 days a week.

So today, even at a minimum wage of \$15 an hour that means a pound of silver then would be worth about \$25,000 in today's

terms, so a “talent” which is 65 pounds of silver, would be worth over a million and a half dollars in today’s values.

So we see the landowner in the gospel was very rich. The servants were clearly in very important positions and were well trusted to be given such a huge amount to care for. The first servant got 5 talents, almost 8 million dollars! Any of you folks who run a business – could you use an 8 million dollar investment? Do you think you might be able to turn a profit with that?

This amount of the “Talent” was used to deliberately exaggerate the size of the responsibility the servants had, so the people would be shocked, and would realize just how important this lesson is - about the way we treat his wealth, his riches!

Pope Francis says the meaning of this is very clear. The man of the parable represents Jesus, we are the servants and the talents are the wealth the Lord entrusts to us.

And here’s the important part we so often overlook. What is this wealth, God’s wealth, his riches that he exaggerates so much in the story? It is faith in the Heavenly Father, his Word, the Eucharist, his love. In short, his most precious goods.

This is the wealth that he entrusts to us. Not just to guard it, but to make it grow. The real wealth God that recognizes is made up of the only things that count, beginning with our faith and love.

Bishop Robert Barron says this story is another example of the “law of the Gift” which is shown so often in the scriptures.

He says, “God exists in gift form – God, by definition, is the one who gives. So for us to have God’s life in us we must be like God and that means we must give whatever we have, especially our faith and love, which are his most precious gifts to us, even if it seems that we don’t have enough for ourselves.

We have to give if we want to have God. This is why it’s hard to have God, because we want to hold on to him for ourselves but whatever we have from God it is meant to become gifts because God is gift

One way to apply this law has to do with faith itself. Our faith will grow only in the amount that we give it away, sharing it with others.

The same is true of love. Remember the old children’s song, “Love is like a magic penny.” It says, “Love is something, if you give it away, you end up having more, if you hold it tight then you won’t have any, but lend it, spend it, you’ll have so many, they’ll roll all over the floor!”

Jesus uses trading and profit as a model of the spiritual life. Trading isn’t easy, you can’t just buy something for ten dollars and then decide to sell it for \$20 or everyone would do it.

You have to find a way to increase its value, like bringing it closer to the buyers or finishing it in some way, in the end the trader’s efforts are what allows the higher price. It is risky because you may not get back what you put into it

But God's wealth is different - life, breath, power, mind, will each increases when they become gifts. Giving them away and taking a risk is the only way to please the master and enter into his joy. When we keep them all to ourselves or hidden away, they fade away. This is why the one who uses his faith gets even more but the one who hides it loses it!

In the end, it's not about how we act but who we become. To try to become like Jesus, having the divine life in us as we will when we receive communion today, means we give it away.

Bishop Barron says, "Instead of trying to fill ourselves up we need to empty ourselves out and instead of being go-getters we need to be go-givers."

Sharing our faith, that valuable talent we get from God, is the only way to increase our faith.

We can't say, "How can I share my faith unless it's strong first?" Don't wait, just do it and it gets stronger!"

Pope Francis asks us, "and what have we done? Who have we "infected" with our faith? How many people have we encouraged with our hope? How much love have we shared with our neighbor? They are questions that do us well to ask.

Jesus does not ask us to preserve His Grace in a safe. He wants us to use it for the benefit of others and that's how it grows. It's as if He tells us: "Here is my mercy, my tenderness, my forgiveness: take it and use it."

So risk your faith, get it out there – don't privatize it. If our faith is not in danger or open to ridicule or persecution it can't grow. We will be attacked by the world as the beatitudes promised and that's the risk.

We are called to find some way to share it, preach it, spread it somehow, specifically!!! Make a plan and take a chance, display the symbols of our faith openly, make the sign of the cross in public, say grace before meals in restaurants, the more public we are the more difficult things may get, but, we risk our money for a big payoff, so we must risk our faith to grow it!

You can fail trading, but you cannot fail to increase your faith by risking it.

What is God saying to us if we act like the lazy servant in the story?

“So I gave you faith and a knowledge of my Son and an understanding of my will and you kept it inside and told no one and never even lived by it yourself, so that your own faith faded away and your soul is lost because you hid my gifts and now you will be banished.”

Not quite so easy for us to ignore this story now is it!

How much better to take that risk, give away the life of God within us, risk the faith and love we have from him by sharing it, and have him say to us, “Well done, enter into my joy!”