

“Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25-21).

Thirty-Third Sunday of the Year

Prov 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Ps 128; 1 Thess 5:1-6; Matt 25: 14-30

The Parable of the Talents gets our attention because of its vivid reference to money, like the popular TV show, “Who wants to be a millionaire?” The talents entrusted to the three servants were a veritable fortune. Each servant is encouraged to invest his portion, and two of them double theirs while the third buries his in the ground for fear of losing it.

The parable can be summarized with the expression, “Use it or lose it,” but in context it had special meaning for the early church awaiting the return of Jesus, who, like the master in the story, is a “long time coming.” What were believers to do in the delay? They were to use the gifts already given them by the Holy Spirit to build up the Kingdom Jesus preached and previewed for them by his resurrection.

When everyone invests their gifts, they multiply and combine to produce miracles no individual can equal. Every charism is important. The servant who buried his one talent deprived himself of his master’s joy and the community of the potential benefit of his gift. Every gift needed was already present in the community. The delay in Jesus’ return in glory did not matter because his glory was already being revealed in communities empowered by his example of service. If his followers loved one another, served one another, collaborated instead of competing with one another, the world would see God revealed in love.

St. Paul understood this when he described the church as one body made up of many members. Every good gift comes from the Spirit and is meant for the building up of the body of Christ, the church. In listing the many gifts of the one Spirit, he put love at the top and praised those who built up the community by service, including administration, teaching, hospitality, even by just being cheerful.

No wonder Paul especially praised women, knowing they were the ones holding his churches together by their many gifts. Today’s reading from Proverbs is a profile of the church in service. Every effective parish knows the value of those who volunteer, encourage, recruit and act as hidden catalysts to

ensure the success of every program and activity. Without them there would be no church.

Jesus' parable invites us today to inventory the gifts we have received and how we have used them. Even if they seem small or insignificant, they may be the missing piece to some larger mosaic still waiting to appear. Only if we invest them, even risk them, will we know their true potential when joined to the talents of others. Then we will hear God say to us, "Come, share your master's joy."