

Talented

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Teach us, good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to seek for any reward
save that of knowing that we do your will.

St Ignatius Loyola 1491 – 1556

My text may be found in Matthew chapter 25 and verse 23:

‘Well done good and faithful servant.’

What’s your favourite verse in the Bible? Silly question: there are so many possibilities. What you choose will depend on what’s happening to you and what you’re feeling at the time but there’s no doubt in my mind that the Bible is a treasure store of wisdom and encouragement. That said, the verse from Matthew chapter 25 and verse 23, which is our text today, is one of my perennial favourites: ‘Well done good and faithful servant.’

The verse is the climax of the ‘Parable of the Talents’ though not the end. It is the verse that sums up the stewardship of the two good servants to whom their master has given differing amounts of money to use on his behalf to make an

honest profit. They are words of approbation for their worthy efforts on his behalf by making good use of all they have been given. They are in sharp contrast to the devastating criticism of the weak-spirited, laziness of the third servant who has failed to make any use whatsoever with that which he had been entrusted, who is dismissed for his neglect of his duty.

'The Parable of the Talents' is well known so let me just recall the main details. A rich man is going on a journey and leaves large sums of money to his servants. The sums involved are reckoned in talents. It is difficult to estimate the value of a talent since a talent is a weight of metal and its worth would vary over time according to whether the coins were copper, silver or gold. To one he gives five; to one he gives two; to one he gives one. The distribution is unequal. But the first two are good servants and they take time and trouble to make the necessary effort to double their master's money. The third does nothing. He hides what he has. He is dishonest not in the sense that he uses the money selfishly wasting it on himself. His misuse of the money lies in the fact that he does nothing with it; he doesn't even bother to bank it though with the current rate of interest, I can understand why not! Instead he simply buries it; the proverbial suitcase under the bed or the shoebox under the sink that Joanne Harris mentions in her novel 'Coastliners'. It is the day of reckoning that brings everything to light. The lazy servant is sent away empty-handed for having failed to make good use of what he had been given; the industrious servants are feel the warmth of their master's approval and are rewarded with even greater responsibility.

It is a great parable but because the English language has many words with several meanings, 'The Parable of the Talents' has a rich ambiguity in that 'talent' does not only mean an outdated but very large sum of money from the Greek 'ταλαντον' (talanton), it can also mean our natural gifts from the Latin talentum'. As such, it fits perfectly into what I want to say in this the second sermon in a series of three on stewardship. The first sermon focused on the verse from Matthew 6 v21 'For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.' It implies that what we value we love and we love what we value. In today's sermon, the emphasis has shifted. If we are good-hearted, not only will we make good use of our money in serving God but also we will make full use of our talents: the skills and qualities of character, as far as we are able.

The central message of 'The Parable of the Talents', then, is all that we have comes from God and that one day we must give him an account of what we have done with it. The parable is an encouragement to make the best use of all we have to make a difference. It is no coincidence that our stewardship campaign when I first came to St Bartholomew' included the dimension of 'Time and Talents'. It's not just your money that develops a church but what you put into making the church work. It is as important to offer a smile and a warm friendly welcome to those coming into church and over a cup of coffee afterwards as it is to work hard raising money at yesterday's Garden Party. We give back to God what he has given us in terms not only of cash but also in what we can do to benefit others.

So one of my favourite verses of the Bible is approbation for a task well done for a life well lived. It is our Christian hope that we will be received by God who will approve what we have made of the opportunities the time, talent and money with which he has blessed us. It is my prayer that with your faithful stewardship that St Bartholomew's Church, Dinard, continue to grow as a centre of that work here in France.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's Dinard

8th August, 2010

H: Sermon 22: Steward 2

