33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time “Invest Well”

Bishop Frank Schuster

The Gospel may strike many as very strange. Why is Jesus telling us a parable based on business practices of his time? The answer may be in part that Jesus was no stranger to the world of business. His father was a *tekton*. A *tekton* is commonly translated as carpenter. But the word carpenter isn't adequate. A *tekton* was more akin to a skilled worker or craftsman. Our word “architect” comes in part from the word *tekton*. Some scholars have suggested that Joseph may have worked at Sephoris as a *tekton*, a town near Nazareth. Where ever Joseph found work, we can be almost certain that Joseph would have taken Jesus along with him at times to help him with the family trade. Jesus was not a stranger to the world of business. Indeed, his family depended on good business as do many families today. When Jesus gathered his main disciples around him, notice who he chooses? He chose fishermen for the most part. Now historians argue that fishermen were very shrewd and accomplished entrepreneurs of Jesus' day. It wasn't a matter of just catching the fish, they had to market their fish, sell their fish, and run a business. In that area of the world, they would have needed to be able to speak several languages. Jesus wisely picks good businessmen to help him in the ministry.

And so we have this parable in today's Gospel. Jesus tells us that God is like a businessman who gives five talents to one servant, two talents to a second servant, and one talent to a third servant. A talent was a weight of measurement of silver, about 80 pounds, equivalent back then to about 6000 denarii or what a common worker might expect to make if he worked for twenty years. A talent was a lot of money. The first servant invests everything and double his money. The second servant invests everything and also doubles his money. The third servant, afraid of the Master, decides to bury his talent in the ground so to not lose it. That third servant, trying to avoid his Master's wrath in fact provoked it. The Master says, you could have at least put it in the bank where I could have at least made some interest. This useless servant loses everything, beginning with his job.

Jesus is using a business principle that is true today, as it was true in Jesus' time. If you want to make your money grow, you have to invest it somehow. If you simply hold on to money, it will lose worth. Inflation alone will do that. I remember as a kid I could buy a candy bar for a quarter. Today, that same candy bar sells for more than a dollar. There is a basic invitation today to be good stewards of our income and making sure our basic needs are met, not only for today but also for the future, emergency funds, rainy day funds, and retirement. There is a basic invitation to plan ahead, be good stewards of money, and don't be someone who gets buried by bad debt. That is not being a good steward.

My friends, there is however, another message that Jesus wants us to consider. It is in fact, the main message Jesus wants to get across to us. Just like in the business world, we have to invest money in order to make money, as disciples of Jesus we have to invest our souls, invest in our love of God and love of neighbor, invest in our community,

invest our whole being toward building up the kingdom of God in our family, workplace and world, if we want to see spiritual dividends.

Notice how the good stewards in the Gospel invested everything that had been given to them in the effort of doubling their money. Similarly, Jesus wants us to invest everything we are, all the gifts God has given us toward Gospel living. Everything we are is God's property on loan to us. Let me say that again. Everything we are is God's property on loan to us. We are challenged to invest ourselves, everything we are. As we double our return on character, as we double our return on maturity, as we double our return on wisdom, as we double our capacity to love, we will return to God at the end of our days everything we are and God will be pleased with what we have done with the gifts he has given us. If we do not invest ourselves, try to vainly hold on to what we have, bury our gifts, put our lights under bushel baskets, we will lose the little we even thought we had.

Anyone who has taken piano lessons will tell you this. Anyone who has studies a language will tell you this. Unless you invest yourself into playing the piano or learning a language, you will forget and lose the little you think you had. Now take that analogy and apply it to the soul. What I hear time and time again from people who have invested themselves into the ministry is that they experience growth in their spiritual journey. When we give of ourselves in service, we get so much back in return. And this dynamic shouldn't surprise us as Catholics. Jesus gave everything for us on the cross and look what he accomplished, the salvation of the whole world!

I love the reading from Proverbs this weekend, "When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. She brings good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She reaches out the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates." The woman celebrated in Proverbs is the kind of person the Lord is calling each of us to be. We can ask ourselves this week, what is one way I can invest my God given gifts for the building up of my family and community. For instance, we can ask ourselves, how can I do my part to make Thanksgiving this coming week more special for the people around me?
We can also ask ourselves, what is one way this week I can be a better steward of the precious gifts God has given us of time, talent and treasure?

As the Church reminds us this time of year, we do not have all the time in the world. When it comes to discipleship we are reminded not to put off to tomorrow what we should be doing today. As St. Paul reminded us in the second reading, "You, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief". Christians, we are children of the light! We are all called to be spiritual *tektons.* We are called to participate with God's grace to build his kingdom on Earth. We are called to be spiritual investors in this world by the measure we invest our God given gifts. The clear invitation Jesus gives us this weekend: invest well.