

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, November 16, 2014**

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

## **SHOWING INITIATIVE**

As we listen to this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 25:14-30), we might wonder if it is an investment class, a motivational seminar, or something more?

In that reading, Jesus tells a parable about a man who before going on a journey entrusts a varying number of "talents" to his three servants. One servant gets five talents, a second gets two, and a third receives just one. On the master's return each is required to give an account of what they did with what they received. The first and second servants report they doubled what had been given them. Five talents became ten, and two became four – for that they are rewarded. However, the servant who received just one talent is punished for simply returning what had been entrusted to him.

If we understand the word "talent" in its contemporary sense, namely, an aptitude or skill that a person possesses, then the parable is about putting the talents that God has given us to good use. If we do, we will grow in our skills and perhaps discover additional talents. For example, people who work hard at developing a musical skill may discover they are able to play more than just one instrument. It is also true that those who neglect their talents may find them lost over time. In that light, the parable seems to be a motivational talk.

If we understand the word talent in its original sense, as a unit of currency, the parable takes on another meaning. A talent was the largest unit of currency at the time. Some scholars estimate that a single talent was the equivalent of a person's annual salary for 15 years. That being the case, in today's economy a talent would be worth about \$500,000. Using that figure, the first servant took what he had been given and made a profit of \$2,500,000, the second servant made a profit of \$1,000,000, while the third servant simply returned what he had received. The third servant made no use of the money. We might say he just hid it under his mattress. With this understanding, the parable teaches us that wise investments will make us rich, while doing nothing with our money will gain us nothing and it may even lead to a loss since money loses its purchasing power over time.

While using our talents and making wise investments may be important, Jesus had another reason in mind for his story. Just before telling the parable Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven will be as when a man who was going on a journey ..." (see Matthew 25:1, 14)

Jesus uses the parable to teach us that those who will be rewarded with a place in the kingdom of heaven are those who imitate the master. The master of the parable was a man of initiative, drive, and energy. He expected the servants, to whom he had entrusted his possessions, to follow his example. Two servants did, the third did not.

The real lesson of the parable is not what we do with money or talents but rather what we do with the faith we have been given. Faith is entrusted to us so that like Jesus we might take the initiative to confidently announce the good news to others and that we might be good news by our acts of mercy, kindness, and compassion. That point is brought home in the parable that immediately follows in Matthew's Gospel, namely, that of the separation of people according to their treatment of the hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned, etc. (Matthew 25: 31-46)

Sunday's Gospel proclaims that those who show initiative and put the faith they received into action will hear the Master say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant...Come share your master's joy." Those who do nothing will be judged useless servants deserving not of the kingdom but of "the darkness outside."

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