

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Recently I read an article that proposed the prevailing ideology in the world is not Christianity or Judaism or Muslim or Hindu; it is not capitalism or communism or socialism; it is not conservatism or liberalism, not progressive nor regressive. No, the author suggests, the prevailing ideology in the world today is simply finance. The god, of course, for the disciples of this ideology is Money. Those who can acquire the most Money can control the universe. The more money a man or a state possesses the more power or control can be asserted by that person or entity.

If, indeed, that proposition is true, then it would seem almost blasphemous to equate the talents in today's Gospel with money, as has often been done. Notice, if you will, that the master in the parable gives to each "according to his ability". What then are we to make of the "talents", spoken of in the parable?

In English, the word "talent" originally meant a "large sum of money," as it does in the Greek. However, perhaps under the influence of this parable, it came over time to mean a "natural capacity for success in some mental or physical activity." For instance, our society calls "talents" those gifts that serve fields like art or music or sport or scientific or academic pursuit.

But I don't think they were the kind of "talents" that Jesus had in mind when he praises the first two recipients who had increased their "talents", saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you greater responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy."

It doesn't seem likely that he is praising them because they can sing five times better or run twice as fast, nor even that their intellectual acumen led them to discover the secrets of the universe.

If, in reflecting on this parable, we can recognize that Jesus is speaking of himself as "a man going on a journey" who later in the parable is referred to as the "master", and we try to comprehend what constitutes "his joy", I think we can begin to get a hint of what the "talents" are of which he speaks.

For your consideration, I would like to suggest that the "talents" spoken of in the parable are "measures of grace" that the Lord gives to each of his disciples. Further, I would equate the word "grace" with God's love. This interpretation allows us to understand that Jesus is saying that God gives to each that measure of His Love according to the ability of each to receive it.

Parents, I think you can appreciate this. Though you love each of your children with your whole heart, each, at his or her particular stage of life or according to his or her personality, emotional or intellectual maturity will receive it accordingly. One may need more support; another more freedom. One may need greater oversight and discipline; another less direction. You give to each according to his or her ability to receive it.

So, I believe that the Lord is telling us that God pours His Love into us according to our ability to receive it. The parable suggests that how we use that Love, spread that Love, share that Love will determine the level at which we will share in His Joy when he returns.

Interestingly, the Lord spends the last third of the parable telling the one who simply hid the “talent”, the “grace”, the “love” out of fear of losing it, what a waste he is. He has doomed himself by loving little. So, it will be for those who think that God has blessed them only for themselves, rather than generously sharing their blessings so that when the Lord returns he will have “harvested where he did not plant and gathered where he did not scatter.”

The “talents” of this parable will provide admission to the master’s joy. It’s important for us to understand that no one hands out Nobel prizes for generosity; nor is one given a medal of honor for forgiveness. No one has ever won an Olympic medal for loving an enemy. Nor are worldly accolades given for compassion, humility, freedom, and love. But these are the “talents” we have been given to share and when we do, we truly do share in our master’s joy.

Friday morning was kind of busy for me. I hadn’t eaten breakfast and by 1:00 P.M., I was starving. So I stopped at the Brass Eagle for lunch, ordered soup and a sandwich which I thoroughly enjoyed. Rather than bringing me the check, the waitress told me that someone “had paid my bill forward” so there was no cost for my meal. At first, I was confused. Then, I got it. So, I said, “Well then bring me someone else’s check so that I can “pay that forward”. She shook her head and smiled. Shortly she came back and said, “Well this is a check for a family in the back and this is one for an elderly couple in the other room. I think both of them could use a break. Which do you want?” I looked at both checks and said, “I hate to make decisions. I’ll pay for both of them.”

The waitress took my money and said she’d be back with my change. A few minutes later she came back. I thanked her and gave her a tip that was equal to 20% of both checks. I gathered my newspaper, put on my cap and my jacket, and as I walked to the door to leave, that quickly the entire wait staff had gathered at the entrance and clapped as I was leaving, shouting, “You are the man”. I was so embarrassed. But then as I sat in my car, thinking about it, I smiled and felt an overwhelming sense of joy.

My seven or eight dollar soup and sandwich because “I paid it forward” cost me more than \$50.00. But the joy that I experienced was truly worth a million dollars. That certainly doesn’t fit in well with the ideology of finance, but I surely shared in “my master’s joy”—and Money can’t buy that.