



The Holy See

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

St Peter's Basilica

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, 19 November 2023

[Multimedia]

Three men find themselves given an enormous sum of money, thanks to the generosity of their master, who is departing on a long journey. That master will come back one day and summon those servants, trusting that he might rejoice with them on how they had made his wealth increase and bear fruit. The parable that we have just listened to (cf. *Mt 25:14-30*) invites us to reflect on two journeys: *the journey of Jesus* and *the journey of our lives*.

The journey of Jesus. At the beginning of the parable, the Lord speaks of “a man going on a journey, [who] summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them” (v. 14). This “journey” reminds us of Christ’s own journey, in his incarnation, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Christ, who came down from the Father to dwell among us, by his death destroyed death and after rising from the dead, returned to the Father. At the conclusion of his earthly mission, then, Jesus made a “return journey” to the Father. Yet before departing, he left us his wealth, a genuine “capital”. He left us himself in the Eucharist. He left us his words of life, he gave us his holy Mother to be our Mother, and he distributed the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we might continue his work on earth. These “talents” are given, the Gospel tell us, “according to the ability of each” (v. 15) and thus for a personal mission that the Lord entrusts to us in our daily lives, in society and in the Church. The apostle Paul says the same thing: “each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift”. Therefore it is said, “When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people” (*Eph 4:7-8*).

Let us look once more to Jesus, who received everything from the hands of the Father, yet did not keep this treasure for himself: “He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (*Phil 2:7*). He clothed himself in our frail humanity. As a good Samaritan, he poured oil on our wounds. He became poor in order to make us rich (*2 Cor 8:9*), and was lifted up on the cross. “For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin” (*2 Cor 5:21*). *For our sake*. Jesus lived for us, for our sake. That was the purpose of his journey in the world, before his return to the Father.

Today’s parable also tells us that “the master of those slaves returned and settled accounts with them” (*Mt 25:19*). Jesus’ first journey to the Father will be followed by another journey, at the end of time, when he will return in glory and meet us once more, in order to “settle the accounts” of history and bring us into the joy of eternal life. We need, then, to ask ourselves: In what state will the Lord find us when he returns? How will I appear before him at the appointed time?

This question brings us to our second reflection: *the journey of our lives*. What path will we take in our lives: the path of Jesus, whose very life was gift, or the path of selfishness? The path with hands open towards others in order to give, give of ourselves, or that of closed hands so that we have more things and only care about ourselves? The parable tells us that, according to our own abilities and possibilities, each of us has received certain “talents”. Lest we be led astray by common parlance, we need to realize that those “talents” are not our own abilities, but as we said, the Lord’s gifts which Christ left to us when he returned to the Father. Together with those gifts, he has given us his Spirit, in whom we became God’s children and thanks to which we can spend our lives in bearing witness to the Gospel and working for the coming of God’s kingdom. The immense “capital” that was placed in our keeping is the love of the Lord, the foundation of our lives and our source of strength on our journey.

Consequently, we have to ask ourselves: What am I doing with this “talent” on the journey of my life? The parable tells us that the first two servants increased the value of the gift they had received, while the third, instead of trusting his master who had given him the talent, was afraid, paralyzed by fear. Refusing to take a risk, not putting himself on the line, he ended up burying his talent. This holds true for us as well. We can multiply the wealth we have been given, and make our lives an offering of love for the sake of others. Or we can live our lives blocked by a false image of God, and out of fear bury the treasure we received, thinking only of ourselves, unconcerned about anything but our own convenience and interests, remaining uncommitted and disengaged. The question is very clear: the first two take a risk through their transactions. And the question we must ask is: “Do I take a risk in my life? Do I take a risk through the power of my faith? As a Christian, do I know how to take a risk or do I close myself off out of fear or cowardice?”

Brothers and sisters, on this World Day of the Poor the parable of the talents is a summons to examine the spirit with which we confront the journey of our lives. We have received from the Lord

the gift of his love and we are called to become a gift for others. The love with which Jesus cared for us, the balm of his mercy, the compassion with which he tended our wounds, the flame of the Spirit by which he filled our hearts with joy and hope – all these are treasures that we cannot simply keep to ourselves, use for our own purposes or bury beneath the soil. Showered with gifts, we are called in turn to make ourselves a gift. Those of us who have received many gifts must make ourselves a gift for others. The images used by the parable are very eloquent: if we do not spread love all around us, our lives recede into the darkness; if we do not make good use of the talents we have received, our lives end up buried in the ground, as if we were already dead (cf. vv. 25.30). Brothers and sisters, so many Christians are “buried underground”! Many Christians live their faith as if they lived underground!

Let us think, then, of all those material, cultural and spiritual forms of poverty that exist in our world, of the great suffering present in our cities, of the forgotten poor whose cry of pain goes unheard in the generalized indifference of a bustling and distracted society. When we think of poverty, we must not forget about its discretion: poverty is discrete; it hides itself. We must courageously go and look for it. Let us think of all those who are oppressed, weary or marginalized, the victims of war and those forced to leave their homelands at the risk of their lives, those who go hungry and those without work and without hope. So much poverty on a daily basis: not one, two or three but a multitude. The poor are a multitude. When we think of the immense numbers of the poor in our midst, the message of today’s Gospel is clear: let us not bury the wealth of the Lord! Let us spread the wealth of charity, share our bread and multiply love! Poverty is a scandal. When the Lord returns, he will settle accounts with us and – in the words of Saint Ambrose – he will say to us: “Why did you allow so many of the poor to die of hunger when you possessed gold to buy food for them? Why were so many slaves sold and mistreated by the enemy, without anyone making an effort to ransom them?” (*De Officiis*: PL 16, 148-149).

Let us pray that each of us, according to the gift we received and the mission entrusted to us, may strive “to make charity bear fruit” and draw near to some poor person. Let us pray that at the end of our journey, having welcomed Christ in our brothers and sisters with whom he identified himself (cf. *Mt* 25:40), we too may hear it said to us: “Well done, good and trustworthy servant... Enter into the joy of your master” (*Mt* 25:21).