

Dear brothers and sisters, the theme that runs through the readings is **creativity and fidelity** that is why the servant who lacked courage, who was fear-driven, who was unproductive, and who was excusing himself by accusing his master of being a hard man, was punished. This servant, like the foolish virgins, was looking for an excuse. He was in a state of denial, denying his own responsibilities. God has given us enormous treasures, talents and He is interested in productivity. He isn't looking for passive dependent persons to follow him, to be his disciple. He wants, rather, gamblers and risk-takers to be his followers and to vivify his Church. Doesn't it strike you that the parables of Jesus always centered on farming, fishing and business activities, all involving risk-taking?

Today's readings basically continue the overall theme from those of last week: productive use of the time before the coming of the Lord. The First Reading, Proverbs 31, may illustrate the energy and industry of the woman. The stress upon industry and competence remarks by the Scriptures can paint beautiful pictures of women. Certainly the description in proverbs of an ideal wife is beautiful and remarkable in that it seems to treat the husband and wife as equals. This ideal wife is trusted by the husband; she does everything to help her husband. She is a **hard willing worker, who handles the finances of the family. She is strong and even able to work in the fields; she is charitable and wise.** She is respected and loved by her children and the community. **Her value is not in her charm or her beauty, but in her wisdom.**

The Gospel portrays a rich man who was about to go abroad and doesn't want his wealth to lie unproductively idle while he is away. So he entrusts its management to three servants, apportioning it in line with his estimation of each one's business acumen: five talents, two talents, one talent respectively. Even one talent denotes a very large sum of money. Most theologians identify the master in the parable too strictly with God. At the same time, the parable challenges a particular type of religiosity that, flowing from a fearful image of God, is concerned simply with not doing anything wrong in order that God will not find anything to punish. Such an attitude neglects to ask what God really wants of believers in the present time, which is an enterprising, even risk-taking, practice. Each one of us has been bestowed upon multiple gifts and blessings by God. Naturally, He expects us to utilize these blessings for His kingdom and for His people and also to develop the talents and abilities He has given us. He wants us to be diligent and watchful for the coming of the Lord who will take into account of all that we have done.

The surprise in the story comes when the master returns and demands an account from the servants. We discover that even though the first servant with five talents had made five more talents and the second servant with two talents had made two more talents, both of them receive exactly the same compliments: **"Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come; share your master's joy."** No comparison is made despite the fact that one earned five and the other only two. They are rewarded not in proportion to how many talents each has made, but in proportion to how many talents each of them started off with. In the Kingdom of Heaven, we are not all measured by the same rule. It is not the talent given to each that matters, but the way they have made use of those talents.

So, what can we say about the third servant who decided to hide his talent? Obviously, he might have compared himself to the other servants with more talents, saw himself at the bottom rung of the ladder, and became discouraged. He did not realize that with his one talent, if he had made just one more talent, he would be rewarded equally as the servant with five talents who made five more. Instead, he is filled with dread and fear at the thought of losing the talent that he has been given and returns it to the master. He had shown no creativity and in the master's view he had acted irresponsibly. He tries to give all possible excuses to his master saying that he knew how hard and demanding the master was; therefore, out of fear, he did not risk investing his money in case he should lose it. The master becomes very angry. He severely condemns him as being both wicked and lazy. As a result he loses everything and ends up being cast out into the darkness.

Finally, dear friends, the parable ends with Jesus saying: **“For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”** It seems rather surprising and unfair, like robbing the poor to pay the rich. But Jesus is rather saying that those who share generously the gifts they have been given are likely to find themselves constantly enriched. During this Mass then, let us ask ourselves how we are using our particular gifts and talents in a creative way in the service of our Christian community and the wider society to advance the interest of God's Kingdom. Let us be prepared for *'the Day of Judgment'* when Christ the Lord takes account of the talents we have been so generously blessed with, and eagerly look forward to hear him say to us, **“Come, share your master's joy.”** Amen!