

"Parable of the Talents": Homily for 33rd Sunday in OT

Steve Jobs is the man who founded the enormously successful company called Apple Computer. Jobs decided that Mr. John Sculley was the man he needed to help him fulfill his dream of building a completely, different kind of Computer Company, one which would make computers available to every person in the world. However, Mr. Sculley was comfortably and safely entrenched as president of the Pepsico Corporation, the makers of the soft drink Pepsi-Cola. In this position, John Sculley had obtained everything that a man could want: power, prestige, public recognition, an enormous salary and a secure future. The thought of a career change requiring a move to the West Coast frightened him. John Sculley knew that he was safe and happy at Pepsico. But he also knew that he had grown to dislike the competitive nature of the business. He also knew how bored he was. Steve Jobs at Apple Computer sensed this. And so, he finally confronted his new friend with this pointed question. He said to John, "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?" That question penetrated deep into the heart and mind of John Sculley. It changed the course of his life. He therefore went to Apple Computer and helped it to grow into one of the most successful corporations in the world. Mr. Sculley's life was changed because he took the risk and decided to invest in himself and others, and to grow.

The Gospel passage today recounts the famous Parable of the Talents. The "talent" was an ancient Roman coin, of great value, and precisely because of this parable's popularity it became synonymous with personal gifts, which everyone is called to develop. In the parable, the Lord appears as a man who, before leaving on a journey, calls his servants and entrusts his property to them (cf. Mt 25:14). God has entrusted us with his greatest

treasures: our own lives and the lives of others. He has entrusted any number of different gifts to each of us. These gifts, these talents, are not something to be stored in a safe; they are a true vocation: the Lord calls us to make our talents bear fruit, with boldness and creativity. God will ask us if we stepped forward and took risks, even losing face.

Of course the third servant dug and hole and buried talent to keep it safe. His actions prompt us to ask: What's so wrong with being cautious? Discretion and deliberateness are virtues, not vices. But with this third servant virtues become vices. Prudence and wariness easily become self-protectiveness and restraint. Inhibition turns to fear, and the servant ends up refusing the risk of trading in the marketplace. The third servant simply waits for the master to come back, so he can return it, perhaps like a hot potato, saying "Here you go – it's all there. Every penny accounted for, just like you left it." Nothing new to see here.

And yet, when the master returns, the prudent decision of the servant is not rewarded. It seems there were some better options for how to pass the time while the master was away. The first two servants had invested their sums, 5 and 2 talents respectively, and each doubled the amount. They are rewarded and given additional responsibilities as a result. Then, the master turns to the third servant, who immediately begins offering explanations and notes that he was afraid to do anything but hide what he had been given in the ground.

And the result isn't pretty. The master is harsh, calling the servant lazy, saying he at least could have put it in a basic interest bearing account. And then he is punished, banished to the darkness where there is weeping and grinding of teeth; one of the most harsh treatments of anyone we read about in Scripture. It's a hard story to swallow. It's not like the third

servant squandered these funds away on gourmet dinners and fine wines. He didn't buy an iPhone 10 or go on an all-night shopping spree on Black Friday. He just maintained what was there; a reasonable and safe venture.

And that seems to be the heart of one issue Jesus is trying to teach in this parable. As John Buchanan notes: The point here is not really about doubling your money and accumulating wealth. It is about living. It is about investing. It is about taking risks. . . The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is not to risk anything, not to care deeply and profoundly enough about anything to invest deeply, to give your heart away and in the process risk everything. The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is to play it safe, to live cautiously and prudently.

The middle ground, you see, the ground of inaction and passivity, of the third servant, of the hiding in a hole, is no ground to stand on at all. This pattern infiltrates our daily lives as well. Fear overtakes our desire and ability to do the things we know are good and right. We don't speak up when things don't seem right because we don't want to create waves. The holes we dig for ourselves are all around us. It seems we think that the holes will somehow protect us a bit, but most of the time they end up burying us instead.

As people of faith, we are called to take risks, not dig holes. This is one of our greatest callings as those who follow Jesus and live in anticipation of his return. To live into the kingdom of heaven that these parables describes means being ready to present ourselves to God not as maintainers of the bare minimum, but as faithful investors who lived fully into the lives God gave us.

Surely the parable is teaching us that spiritual growth is ongoing for the rest of our lives. It is not a question of once saved, always saved, but growing in virtue and fruits of the spirit for the rest of

our lives. Let us double the talents, increasing our virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Let us allow the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity open us up ever more to God and his activity in our lives and let us allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to bear fruits in our lives so that we may be worthy to hear, "Come, share your master's joy" (Matt 25:21,23). Amen