

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1Thes. 5:1-6; Matt. 25:14-30

In this week's reading from Matthew, we will hear many terms that were common in Jesus' time to a Jew, but mean little or nothing to us unless we put on the mind of an ancient Jew. With the scholarship of William Barclay from the Daily Study Bible Series, we can investigate the words within their time.

According to Barclay, this reading was directed to the Scribes and Pharisees, as were the messages of the last few Sundays. These men devoted their lives to preserving the Law exactly as it had always been. They even had a saying, which means that they chose to build a fence around the Law, a fence made up of 613 smaller laws, which kept them from breaking the Ten Commandments. Jesus is condemning this stagnation in Sunday's reading. He is asking them to be adventuresome with the Law.

A talent was not a coin, but rather a weight. It could be coinage of copper, gold, or silver to equal that weight. Silver would have been the most common. To understand the amount given by the master, we could translate that weight of silver to a dollar value of today.

One talent was equal to 6,000 denarii. One denarius was a day's wages. So, to have one talent was to have the equivalent of daily wages for 17 years. The five talents the first servant received would take a daily laborer 85 years to earn. If we figure using a \$10.00 per hour job, which would mean about \$20,000 per year, then one talent, or 17 years of earnings, would be \$340,000. That is the amount entrusted to the third servant. The first servant received five times that amount, or \$1,700,000!

Obviously, this story tells us that our God is a very generous God. Besides monetary value, we also must reflect on the meaning of

talent as it applies to God-given gifts or skills. This parable tells us that to use them wisely means that we will be given more skill besides. To not use them means that we will lose even these. Every gift has been given with a purpose. Not to use it is a sign of ingratitude. Beyond these gifts, moments must also be valued as treasure. Relationships that help us grow need to be nurtured. Opportunities to proclaim God's Word to another person are treasures also though we may not be around to see the harvest. May we use wisely God's gifts to us.

Humorist and author, Erma Bombeck, is quoted as saying:

When I stand before God at the end of my life, I hope I can say, "I have no talents left. I used everything you gave me."

That sums up the message of the gospel rather well.