

YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A LITTLE; ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER! – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 25.14-30

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

With Jesus, the relationship with God, with the Father, changes. No longer servants of the Lord, but sons of the Father. But the wrong idea of God can ruin a person's existence and prevent the transition from servant to son.

Let us hear what Matthew writes for us in his gospel chapter 25, 14- 30. Jesus is talking of the Kingdom of Heaven. *"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants..."* in the oriental world, all employers of an important person are called servants even if, as in this case, they are highly ranking officials.

"...and entrusted to them his property." This man does not leave his property in custody, he transfers it. The verb "to entrust" used by the evangelist, means, "to give" without being returned. *"To one he gave five talents,..."* A talent was a measure of value very important; a talent was between 26 and 36 kilos of gold; a talent was the equivalent of 6,000 deniers, about 20 years salary for a laborer, a fortune.

So, *"To one he gave five talents to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability."* literally "the strength". This man, the master knows his officials and knows their ability. *"He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them,..."* and the one who received two does the same. The first earns another five, and the next earns another two, acting as a gentleman, as if the talents were theirs.

"But he who had received the one talent...", attention, one talent is not a little, as I said, a talent is about 30 kilos of gold or a laborer's pay for 20 years, so an enormous fortune, but like this he remains a servant, he does not feel like a gentleman. *"... went and dug in the ground "* Burying this talent is like burying one's own life, but he does it also because, according to the rabbinic law, if one buries money given to him, in case of robbery, he was not obliged to return it.

So, he takes all the precautions, he does not believe in the generosity of his master *".. and hid his master's money. "Now after a long time the master of those servants came.. "* the evangelist speaks in the present, representing the action that continues in Jesus' community, *"..and settled accounts with them."* He does not return to get back what he has given, but to see what they have done with it.

"And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' Well at this point the master does not ask for the return of that which he had given, but rejoices and exclaims *'Well done,..."* this exclamation is like that in the book of Genesis when God, the creator, admires his work, *".. good and faithful servant You have been faithful over a little;"* he says a little, but in fact it is a great deal, an immense fortune, 150 kilos of gold, an extraordinary fortune and the master says it was a little.

"I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." he is invited to be part of all his possessions, of all his life and he is raised from the condition of a servant to that of the master, free like him. The same for the one that had received two talents, but it is a different situation for he that had received one talent.

"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew..'" he reasons on that which he knows, but he understand wrongly. *"...you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,..."* but this is a distorted image that is not justified in the narrative. In the narrative we see a master not generous, but foolishly generous, that not only does not want his enormous fortune returned that he had left with his servants, but he make them part of his entire fortune and of his life.

"..I was afraid," Here is what the evangelist is getting at, a distort image of God, the fear of God can be fatal for some people, who have fear to act for fear of being reprimanded or to make a mistake. John will say in the first letter, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."(1 John 4, 18)

I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent..", whilst the others had taken possession and acted freely, this one had remained servant, and emphasizes, *".. in the ground. Here you have what is yours."* He had never thought of it as his, and here is the reaction of the master. *"the master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown..'"* he admits to be a 'hard man', *"... and gather where I scattered no seed?"* the master does not agree with the image that the servant has of him, it is a distort image.

"Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest." The fear of making mistakes, in the individual, had paralyzed his actions, his growth. And here is the sentence. *"So take the talent from him.."* he had not known what to do with it, it was a fortune and he was not able to use it, in fact for him that fortune that the master had given him had become a motive of fear, anxiety and worry. So the master says to him, it is useless to keep it, *"...and give it to him who has the ten talents."*

This individual was not punished for having done something wrong, he had simply done nothing. And here is the sentence, *"For to everyone who has ,..."* this verb we have already come across in Matthew's gospel in the parable of the four pieces of land, indicating, he who produces, *" who has.. "*, meaning anyone that produces and yields that which has been given to him. *".. will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."*

Who produces love receives on behalf of the Father a great and higher capacity for love. He who does not love, who does not direct his life for others, he will waste away and remain with nothing. *"... the worthless servant..."* worthless because he had not known what to do with this fortune, *"..cast into the outer darkness."* actually he is already there because by burying the talent he has buried himself. *"... there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

"..weeping and gnashing of teeth." is the desperation for having failed in one's own existence.