

## Homily - Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

For much of my life, I've had an interest in the theory and practices around time management.

Just hear me out - it's not *quite* as boring as it sounds...

The first time I ever really gave any thought to managing time in a serious way was my senior year of college at William and Mary.

The reason my time suddenly became a pressing issue was simple: I wanted to enter seminary the following year, and to do that, I needed to finish my degree as quickly as possible.

And that meant two semesters, back to back, taking eight courses each.

18 credit hours, if you're familiar with the academic system.

And, very abruptly, I found that I no longer had very much time.

That was when I learned firsthand about a principle that carries over into almost every dimension of life: choosing to do one thing with our time is to choose NOT to do something else.

Time management, I would argue, is often better understood as an exercise in priority management: articulating what is most important in our lives and making the best use of the limited resources we have to attend to those priorities.

That human principle ties very directly both to the concerns that Saint Paul raises in his letter to the Thessalonian church, and even to Christ's parable of the Talents.

The scope of our life is limited, even if we aren't always mindful of those limits, and a virtuous life is one which takes advantage of those limited resources - our time itself, and the spiritual resources of the gifts and graces that God has given us - to achieve our full potential for holiness.

The parable highlights something we know from experience - all of us receive different sorts of gifts in different degrees and kinds throughout our lives.

Some are our natural abilities, dispositions, and human qualities that we're born with or grow into.

These are the most obvious gifts, the ones that other people quickly name and identify in us, and they're the ones we typically rely upon as we move along our careers and conventional paths in life.

But there's an entire other category of gifts as well - more along the lines of what Saint Paul speaks of in his other letters, namely the spiritual gifts and charisms that God forms in us to build up his Church.

These kinds of gifts flourish most as we grow in prayer.

Many of them only really develop in a distinct way once we've matured in our relationship with the Lord and committed to a serious prayer life over a long period of time.

In a real way, many of us probably don't realize the potential we have for living out those kinds of gifts, because we haven't reached that stage yet.

Now, with all that being said, here's the truth that should both encourage us and challenge us:

The Lord is going to hold us accountable not just for the gifts we have right now - according to this Gospel, he's holding us accountable for the gifts and potential we *could* achieve if we make the best possible use of them.

As Jesus himself put it in the parable, those gifts we have now - of our time itself, the virtues he has formed in us, and our spiritual gifts - *must* be invested now in order to grow into their full flourishing, where they can truly bear fruit in living out our love of God and neighbor.

So, where do we begin?

In my opinion, one of the first things we might be tempted to do when we start thinking about our own time, gifts, and potential is to compare ourselves to others.

I, personally, would recommend against this.

Why? There are several reasons, the most important of which is that at the end of the day, the main way our success or failure at making the best use of our gifts will be measured isn't by external achievements or anything that you'd be able to clearly see from the outside.

In reality, the only metric that matters is love - the pure, divine charity that flows from God's own heart.

Think of that core message in Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: without love, the rest of those gifts and charisms are basically worthless and meaningless.

On the other hand, when put to their right use, the fruit of our prayers and life of service should be an increase in love - first of all in ourselves, and then through us in those who receive the fruits of that gift of ourselves.

Depending what gifts we've been given, that love will take root in different ways.

Saint Gregory, explaining this concept in his own commentary on the parable of the talents, writes,

“Let him then who has understanding look that he hold not his peace; let him who has affluence not be dead to mercy; let him who has the art of guiding life communicate its use with his neighbor; and him who has the faculty of eloquence intercede with the rich for the poor. For the very least endowment will be reckoned as a talent entrusted for use.”

Different gifts, in other words, but every one of them shaped and guided by the same love.

So, we must ask: how have our own gifts been put into action?

To answer that, we may have to do some soul-searching, guided and enlightened by the help of the Holy Spirit.

First, we need to discern what those gifts are. Some might be obvious, others noticeable more from the outside to people who are close to us.

And others may not yet have come to fruition, but rather require us to commit ourselves to prayer and a serious life of prayer virtue for a while before they can really flourish.

Either way, the most important thing we can do today is, simply, to make sure we have our priorities straight.

If the things that are filling our time and our minds are not ordered toward God, then we need to seriously give some thought to whether our gifts are being used the way that they should.

Regardless of how many and what sort of gifts they might be, those are our talents - and we only have this life to choose to make the best use of them for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Today, then, let's entrust these gifts and our desires to the Lord, and ask him to continue renewing each of us, and his Church, in the way and time he desires.

And, most of all, let's ask him to direct our hearts - to be ready and alert to choose his will in all things, wherever that may lead us, and pray that when we come to see him face to face, we will hear those blessed words:

"Well done, my good and faithful servant...  
Come, share your master's joy."