

Parable of the talents

At the end of the year, the Church brings to our consideration the parable of the talents. It is not easy for us to grasp what a talent is. A talent was not a coin but a measure of value, a unit of account, worth about fifty kilos of silver. It was a lot of wealth. With a talent, a family could live for 30 years. It is so much that it doesn't matter if it is five, two or one. All we need to do is to produce a double amount. From here we have the expression talented people.

We don't like this parable, we don't like being tested. We don't like exams. We don't like having to produce or reach a certain quota. The elements of the parable are clear. We are the servants. The talents are the qualities, gifts, virtues, God has bestowed on us. The master is God. The journey of the master signifies the duration of our lives. His unexpected return means our death. The settling of accounts is our judgement. Heaven is the banquet that we have been invited to, if we produce our share.

This parable has to do with spiritual economics, with investment, risk and return. God is the banker, the one who has lent us everything. We complain about banks and we depict bankers dressed with suits, fat and smoking cigars. We give them our money and they charge us to look after it, while they make money with our money. But God is a different kind of banker: we haven't given him anything. It is the other way around: all we have comes from him. We are completely in debt to him, at his disposal. We belong to him. And we think that we own our lives. We are the stewards of God's property. What he is asking from us is to produce, to give back to him the interest on his loan. Not for him, but for us. He is going to give us back what we produce and a reward for our good investment, much more valuable than anything we possess: the infinite gift of heaven. It is a good deal, the best one. And we are still doubting what to do.

These talents God has given us have a special quality. They follow the law of the spiritual gifts: unless we invest them, we lose them. If you don't risk, you cannot double; it is all or nothing. If you don't work with your talents you lose them. Money that is not invested loses its value. If we don't invest our lives, we are going to waste them. People who risk a lot can be successful. Saints risk everything and gain everything. It is a paradox: the more you give, the more you get. If you don't use it, you lose it; if you keep it, it disappears. Unless the grain of wheat is buried and dies, it doesn't produce. It is like a voucher that has to be used by a certain time. Or like air time in your phone, that if you don't use it, it disappears once the month is finished. Unless the grain of wheat is buried in the ground, it doesn't produce the ear.

This parable brings to our consideration two main ideas: we are stewards of the talents God has given us and therefore we have to give account of them when we die. It is not my time, but God's time; it is not my life, but His life. We know we are going to die, but we don't think about it, or we live as if it is never going to happen.