

Homily - Year 33 A - November 19, 2017

Have you ever been compared to a beaver? If I were, I don't know if that would be a compliment or a criticism. Beavers are very creative engineers who instinctively can build bridges with methods we need to learn about in college. However, these creative beaver engineers are also destructive because their dams are meant only for themselves and their own comfort. They don't care if their dams dam up the flow of water elsewhere in the ecosystem.

Beavers have been given a gift, and they use that gift. Our gospel passage makes it clear that we, too, have been given gifts. Our obligation consists in using those gifts, not hiding or squandering them, always using them to build, not dams, but rather the kingdom of God.

You see, the men in the gospel passage received gifts, money, from their master. The master wanted to see what they would do with the money because he freely gave the gifts based on the abilities of each recipient. In other words, one did not really get more than the other, but each received according to what he could handle. Two of the men doubled what they received, in other words, they used the gifts well and made them grow. The third did nothing but bury the gift, afraid of losing it rather than using it.

Let's look more closely at this parable. The gospel writer tells us that the master gave out talents "to each according to his ability." He did not say "according to need" or "according to what he wanted." Each man received based on each man's ability.

There is a corresponding brief phrase. In speaking to each of the servants upon his return, the master says to the one who received five talents and the one who received two talents: "since you were faithful in small matters." Both five and two were considered small.

When I look out at a typical parish congregation, I see lots of talent, talent given to you by God according to your ability. I cannot play the violin, but others can. Remember the woman in the first reading today received praise, not because she earned money, but because she used her talent of sewing.

The point that Jesus makes is that each person has talent, according to his ability to handle the talent.

The second point is that the talents must, and I underscore must, be used. The only one cursed in the gospel was the man who buried his talent

and did nothing with it. What a tremendous waste of talent even if it was only one talent.

In the context of the Church, our talents must be used and be used by us for others. That is what makes the Church tick. The accumulation of each person's talent makes the parish community tick. Without the talents of each person, the parish would be dead. Remember, the only person condemned was the one who did not use his talent. The ones who were praised were those who used their talents.....the quantity mattered little. Using the talent counted.

The conclusion that we must draw from today's scripture requires us to recognize our talent as coming from God and making sure that we use that talent well. Unlike the beavers who use their talents only for themselves, may we use our gifts to build up God's people.