



WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

33th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 19 November 2017

[Multimedia]

We have the joy of breaking the bread of God's word, and shortly, we will have the joy of breaking and receiving the Bread of the Eucharist, food for life's journey. All of us, none excluded, need this, for all of us are *beggars* when it comes to what is *essential*: God's love, which gives meaning to our lives and a life without end. So today too, we lift up our hands to him, asking to receive his gifts.

The Gospel parable speaks of gifts. It tells us that we have received talents from God, "according to ability of each" (*Mt 25:15*). Before all else, let us realize this: we do have talents; in God's eyes, we are "talented". Consequently, no one can think that he or she is useless, so poor as to be incapable of giving something to others. We are chosen and blessed by God, who wants to fill us with his gifts, more than any father or mother does with their own children. And God, in whose eyes no child can be neglected, entrusts to each of us a mission.

Indeed, as the loving and demanding Father that he is, he gives us responsibility. In the parable, we see that each servant is given talents to use wisely. But whereas the first two servants do what they are charged, the third does not make his talents bear fruit; he gives back only what he had received. "I was afraid – he says – and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours" (v. 25). As a result, he is harshly rebuked as "wicked and lazy" (v. 26). What made the Master displeased with him? To use a word that may sound a little old-fashioned but is still timely, I would say it was his *omission*. His evil was that of *failing to do good*. All too often, we have the idea that we haven't done anything wrong, and so we rest content, presuming that we are good and just. But in this way we risk acting like the unworthy servant: he did no wrong, he didn't waste the talent, in fact he kept it carefully hidden in the ground. But to do no wrong is not enough. God is not an inspector looking for unstamped tickets; he is a Father looking for children to whom he can entrust his property and his plans (cf. v. 14). It is sad when the Father of love does not receive a generous response of love from his children, who do no more than keep the rules and follow the commandments, like hired hands in the house of the Father (cf. *Lk 15:17*).

The unworthy servant, despite receiving a talent from the Master who loves to share and multiply his gifts, guarded it jealously; he was content to keep it safe. But someone concerned only to preserve and maintain the treasures of the past is not being faithful to God. Instead, the parable tells us, the one who adds new talents is truly "faithful" (vv. 21 and 23), because he sees things as God does; he does not stand still, but instead, out of love, takes risks. He puts his life on the line for others; he is not content to keep things as they are. One thing alone does he overlook: his own interest. That is the only right "omission".

Omission is also the great sin where the poor are concerned. Here it has a specific name: *indifference*. It is when we say, "That doesn't regard me; it's not my business; it's society's problem". It is when we turn away from a brother or sister in need, when we change channels as soon as a disturbing question comes up, when we grow indignant at evil but do nothing about it. God will not ask us if we felt righteous indignation, but whether we did some good.

How, in practice can we please God? When we want to please someone dear to us, for example by giving a gift, we need first to know that person's tastes, lest the gift prove more pleasing to the giver than to the recipient. When we want to offer something to the Lord, we can find his tastes in the Gospel. Immediately following the passage that we heard today, Jesus says, "Truly I tell you that, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:40*). These least of our brethren, whom he loves dearly, are the hungry and the sick, the stranger and the prisoner, the poor and the abandoned, the suffering who receive no help, the needy who are cast aside. On their faces we can imagine seeing Jesus' own face; on their lips, even if pursed in pain, we can hear his words: "This is my body" (*Mt 26:26*).

In the poor, Jesus knocks on the doors of our heart, thirsting for our love. When we overcome our indifference and, in the name of Jesus, we give of ourselves for the least of his brethren, we are his good and faithful friends, with whom he loves to dwell. God greatly appreciates the attitude described in today's first reading that of the "good wife", who "opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy" (*Prov 31:10,20*). Here we see true goodness and strength: not in closed fists and crossed arms, but in ready hands outstretched to the poor, to the wounded flesh of the Lord.

There, in the poor, we find the presence of Jesus, who, though rich, became poor (cf. *2 Cor 8:9*). For this reason, in them, in their weakness, a "saving power" is present. And if in the eyes of the world they have little value, they are the ones who open to us the way to heaven; they are our "passport to paradise". For us it is *an evangelical duty* to care for them, as our real riches, and to do so not only by giving them bread, but also by breaking with them the bread of God's word, which is addressed first to them. To love the poor means to combat all forms of poverty, spiritual and material.

And it will also do us good. Drawing near to the poor in our midst will touch our lives. It will remind us of what really counts: to love God and our neighbour. Only this lasts forever, everything else passes away. What we invest in love remains, the rest vanishes. Today we might ask ourselves: “What counts for me in life? Where am I making my investments?” In fleeting riches, with which the world is never satisfied, or in the wealth bestowed by God, who gives eternal life? This is the choice before us: to live in order to gain things on earth, or to give things away in order to gain heaven. Where heaven is concerned, what matters is not what we *have*, but what we *give*, for “those who store up treasures for themselves, do not grow rich in the sight of God” (Lk 12:21).

So let us not seek for ourselves more than we need, but rather what is good for others, and nothing of value will be lacking to us. May the Lord, who has compassion for our poverty and needs, and bestows his talents upon us, grant us the wisdom to seek what really matters, and the courage to love, not in words but in deeds.

