

Have you ever asked, Why am I here? What is my purpose in life?

The old Baltimore catechism put it best. “Our purpose is to know God, to love God, and to serve God.” And although that message has been expanded upon, deepened, and more words have been added, it hasn’t been improved upon.

So how do we do that? We can know God to the extent that He has revealed Himself to us through His Church. For two thousand years the Holy Spirit has led the Church and revealed much to us about God. This revelation is passed on to us through the Magisterium, which is the teaching office of the Church, Sacred Scripture, and Holy Tradition. And because the three are interrelated, where one is, the other two must be. When the Magisterium, guided by the Holy Spirit, teaches, scripture and Tradition are also there.

So we can know God through the Church. And the more we know Him, and what He wants for us, the more we love Him. And because we love Him, we want to do things for Him. We want to serve Him.

How do we serve Him? In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus gives us the answer.

The readings remind us that we too will one day stand before God and have to account for how we served the Lord. Like the servants in the parable we too shall have to answer for what we have given

over for the Kingdom of God; did we have a generous spirit that sought to do great things for God and His Church, or a mediocre response to His generous gifts, making salvation and holiness an afterthought?

The parable of the talents is about man accounting for Himself before God. It is also about our purpose in life. A talent was a large amount of money. It is estimated that even one talent would be worth well over a million dollars in today's money. But the master did not divide His possessions equally among His three servants. He gave to each according to his ability. Each gift was given with thought and compassion for the individual. And none was given more than he could handle. The first two servants returned to the master the money they had been given with interest. And they were well rewarded. But it is the third servant that interests us, it is in the third servant that we are taught.

At first look this seems another example of God being unfair in our eyes. After all, the servant gave back to the master exactly what he had been given. Wasn't he the most cautious with what was not even his? Why did he receive such harsh punishment?

Once again we are reminded that God's ways are not our ways. And once again scripture itself teaches us. The servant knew what the master expected. His own words condemn him. He knew the master was a demanding person, one who harvested where he did

not plant and gathered where he did not scatter. And out of fear, he buried his talent in the ground where it did nothing.

God is a God of the living, not of the dead. He gives living things to the living, living things that need to grow. If we let our gifts die, then we cannot even return to God the living thing that he gave us.

The first two servants are motivated by love for their Master. They want to give back to Him more than they have been given, as a gift, out of love. The third servant is motivated by selfishness.

If fear had truly been the motive, would not the third servant have worked all the harder? But the master saw him for what he was, wicked and lazy. He could not even be bothered to bank the money at simple interest. The third servant shows us a person who is focused on his own self; he easily dictates how God should act and who God should be. The problem is that his fear became an excuse for his ineptitude and laziness.

There is room for a “holy fear” but like all things it has its proper place and its’ proper degree.

There was once a man who was discerning a calling to the religious life. At one point he went on a retreat with a very traditional order. He was impressed with their way of life. They kept to a rigorous schedule of prayer and work and cultivated a sense of humble piety. But in the end the man did not feel he was

called to them because as he wrote to a friend “they are afraid of error, more than they love the truth.”

The proper disposition for our fear is not cowering timidity but rather it is a sense of awe centered on God’s glory and power. He is all good and deserving of all our love. And love is our key to serving Him.

This is the essential nature of discipleship. To live for another is to give up all sense of self. We give up control of our lives to God and that can be very frightening. We no longer live for ourselves but live for another. And as any one who has ever been in love knows, there is a danger there, a danger that our heart may be broken.

C.S. Lewis wrote “to love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung, and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.”

To live as sons and daughters of Heaven is to live in Christ and be open to His ways as taught to us by His proper authority here on earth, the Church.

Love then, not fear is the proper response to the gifts God has given us. We are all given unique talents, abilities and blessings, in a very personal way. These are gifts given to us to further the Kingdom of God, to build up the body of Christ. And there are no small gifts. Nor have we been given more than we can handle. We have been given, each according to our abilities. We are called to trust in God, not in ourselves, and give him good return on what He has entrusted to us, this is our gift to Him.

The Book of Proverbs speaks of the worthy wife. Her value is far beyond pearls. She is praised for her industriousness, and rewarded for her labor. Recall the Blessed Mother. From the beginning of her life, when she was presented in the temple, Mary was dedicated to God. God sanctified her for her unique role in His plan of salvation. And the sanctification of Mary passes to us, her children, for Jesus gave her to all of us as our mother. We too are sanctified by God, that we might enjoy and share in God's saving work.

So we are called to work, "Work while it is still day, for night comes wherein no one can work." We are children of the light, we do not know when the Day of the Lord will come, but it doesn't

matter. Anyone who strives to live a life in Christ is always ready to render account.

It is said that someone once asked St. Francis of Assisi while he was gardening, “What would you do if the Lord returned right now?” and St. Francis, without looking up, responded, “Finish my gardening.”

So when Christ returns for what is His, how shall we account for ourselves? Will we cower and tremble, knowing that we have failed as stewards? Or after having lived a life of virtue and love will we repay God in good measure, flowing over?

November is a time in which we remember with special devotion all those who have passed into glory ahead of us, all of our departed loved ones. It is also a time for us to reflect upon our own mortality. As the world around us darkens and withdraws upon itself, we take time to consider how we have shown our love for God. Have we taken the gifts He has given us and added to them, developed them, and grown them? Or have we ignored those gifts in pursuit of our selfish desires?

Let us stay sober and alert. Let us use the graces we have been given to love God by serving our brothers and sisters. So that when the Master comes again into His Kingdom and asks us to render an account for ourselves, we will hear the words.

“Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come, share your Master's joy.”