

It's the eternal question, why are we here? What is our purpose in life? Or as a popular novelist put it, what's the answer to life, the universe and everything? Actually, we know the answer.

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. Our purpose is to know God, to love Him, and to serve him.

So how can we know God? We can know Him 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 to us much 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. Just as where the Son is so also the Father is, and the Holy Spirit. Where one is, all three are present. When the Magisterium, guided by the Holy Spirit, teaches, scripture and Tradition are also there.

So we can know God to some extent. And the more we come to know Him, and what He wants for us, the more we love Him. We love God because God loves us. He wants us to be with him for all eternity. And because we love Him, we want to do things for Him. We want to serve Him.

So how do we serve Him?

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. Even one talent represented a considerable sum. 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 master then left on a long journey. And when he returns, the servants are called before Him to account for their stewardship. The first two had lost no time in putting the resources they were given to good use. By the time the master returned they were able to double what had

been entrusted to them. 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. In the last few weeks we heard about the wedding guest who came improperly dressed, and the workers who were paid a day's wage for an hour's work. In this case, 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?

Remember that God's ways are not our ways. If we listen closely scripture itself provides the answer. 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. To bury them in the ground, to neglect them, makes no sense. In that case we could not even return to God the living thing that he gave us in the first place.

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 take the simplest action that might have increased the master's gift. The servant shows us a person who is focused on his own self and his own desires. He easily dictates how God should act and who God should be. We do not always get to choose how we use the gifts God has given us. The problem here is that the servant's 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.

Do you remember when Jesus calmed the storm? I'm sure we have all been outside in the middle of a severe storm. Think about it, heavy rain and wind, maybe even occasional thunder and lightening, the full force of nature on display all around you. Now imagine someone going out into the middle of the storm and saying "Be still,"

and the storm goes away. Wouldn't you be in awe of that person and maybe even just a little bit afraid?

Fear of God is not sniveling temerity 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 and motivation for 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 communicated to us by His proper authority here on earth, the Church.

The proper response to the gifts God has given us is love, not fear. 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, to show our love for Him by serving Him in a way unique to each one of us. And there are no small gifts. We have not 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 Gospel reminds 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, focusing on ourselves and our own selfish desires, making salvation and holiness an afterthought?

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.

Let us stay sober then, and alert. Let us use the graces we have been given to serve God and to serve our brothers and sisters. So that when Christ comes again into His Kingdom and asks us to render an account for ourselves before God, we will hear the words that in our hearts, we long to hear.

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