



Catholic Church and School

The Story

A priest went fishing on his day off. Priests take days off too and do things like that. He stood along the shoreline, casting his line in the water when all of the sudden; his line was caught in a tree.

After pulling and struggling for some time, the pastor finally lost his temper and patience...and he said a bad word. He said, "Fiddlesticks!" Ok, this is homily is rated G for General Audiences! I don't know what some of you were thinking. Now he quickly recovered his composure and at first he was thankful because he was several miles from another person and many more miles from his parish so there was no chance that anyone heard him. No one would ever know.

But then the priest realized, "What I am in public is an illusion; what I am in private is the real me." What about us? There may be times when what we are in public may be an illusion; what we are in private is the real us. What we are sometimes at Church or at work or at grocery stores may be an illusion, but what we are in our cars or in our houses or in our bedrooms, when no one else is around, that is the real us.

Character

That private side of our lives, when the Master seems to be away, that is what we are called to work on in this Gospel. It speaks to us about character. Character is a description of a person's works and qualities and abilities. It's who we really are. Character is who you are in private, when you're alone. Character is who you are when no one is looking. The goal of good character is to make our private lives match our public lives.

Christian character is composed of virtues, that is, good habits that you and I choose to practice in our lives with the help of God. The three best-known virtues are faith, hope, and love. This Gospel is about virtues. The "talents" in this parable are not just a matter of money. These "talents" can be explained in terms of virtues which are good habits. The more you practice them, the more they increase.

Poor Servant

At first, this Gospel may not seem quite right to us. It almost doesn't seem Christian! We may sympathize with the poor servant who received only one talent and then had even that taken away. It seems like the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It just doesn't seem very fair, does it? But how do we know these talents, these virtues, were not assigned based on the preparation and practice of each servant? Perhaps their talents and abilities, or lack thereof, developed through their own choices.

Virtues (loving, truth telling)

Consider these talents in terms of virtues. Virtues are good habits, like loving people and telling the truth. The more that we love people, the more we develop the virtue of

loving and, like a good habit, it becomes second nature, automatic to us. The more virtues that we have and the more that we practice them, the more we receive from them and the easier it becomes to do them. Virtues, like the talents in this parable, can increase over time.

The second servant had two talents and made two more. Perhaps the second servant developed the talents, the virtues, of loving and telling the truth. Like loving, the more you tell the truth, the easier it is to tell the truth. The more you tell the truth, the more believable you become. The virtue of truth-telling is fruitful and yields more virtue.

Now, could it be that the last servant, who lost his one talent, chose only one virtue, and ignored others? The Gospel doesn't exclude that possibility. Perhaps he chose the virtue of loving people but chose not to develop the talent of telling the truth.

We all know the story of the boy who cried wolf. He ignored the truth during his moments of crying wolf...we all know what happened to him. Can a person choose only certain virtues and ignore the others? No, not really. Can a person choose the virtue of loving others but not the virtue of telling the truth? No, not really. Eventually, the virtue of love can be lost by not telling the truth. Can we really love someone whom we cannot trust? No, not really. This may have been the case with this last servant. He lost his one talent of loving people because he never chose to practice a second talent of telling the truth.

Let's pray for the grace and strength in this Holy Eucharist to live lives filled with virtues – filled with Faith, Hope, Love, Honesty and Truth. This is the way of making our private lives match our public lives. Then, one day, may our Master say to each of us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

*Fr. David Ruppert at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
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