

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible. Have small votive candles in glass containers. Group members who wish name and light a candle for a person whose investment of time and energy in their parish or neighborhood they value. Respond to each name:

ALL: We remember with gratitude.

Sunday's gospel is about doubling an investment. Pope Francis has weighed in on an economy that defies the free market and makes the already rich richer. He pleads for an economy of inclusion.

“We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market. Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms, and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment, and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality” (*Joy of the Gospel* #204).

Pope Francis wonders if many professional and media people live too far removed from those who are poor to know their problems. “They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development

and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population (*Laudato Si'* #49). The pope urges us to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. To repair our common home requires also bettering the life of people who are poor.

In 2015, the United Nations celebrated its work to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals it set in 2000. It took only 10 years to achieve the first goal—to cut in half the number of people living on \$1.25 per day. Then looking to the future, 195 nations agreed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals to achieve by 2030. The first is no poverty and the second zero hunger.

Good health and quality education are the third and

four goals. The United Nations achieved having 90% of the children in the world complete primary school, both boys and girls by 2012. The work goes on to achieve higher levels and struggle against the effects of war and climate change.

Many of the new goals aim to repair Earth. The new goals include sustainable energy, water, climate action, life below water in seas, life on land and biodiversity—areas in which Pope Francis encourages global action in his exhortation on our common home. Achieving the first goals showed the nations of the world that more is possible and more is needed for a sustainable future for all.

● How are you joining in home repair for Earth?

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 Goals to Transform Our World



Credit: United Nations Department of Public Information

GOSPEL

Come, share my joy.



JESUS: A man going on a journey summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them, according to the abilities of each. To one, he gave five talents; to a second, he gave two talents; to a third, one talent. Immediately the servant who received the five talents invested them and made another five. In the same way, the servant who received two talents doubled the figure. The servant who received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and buried the master's money. After a long absence, the master came home and settled accounts.

SERVANT 1: Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.

MASTER: Well done! You are an industrious and reliable servant. Because you have been so dependable in this matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!

SERVANT 2: Master, you entrusted me with two talents, and I have made two more.

MASTER: You, too, are a good and trustworthy servant. Because you

have been so trustworthy in this matter, I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share my joy!

SERVANT 3: Master, I knew you were a harsh man. You reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter, so I was afraid.

I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, I am returning what is yours.

MASTER: You worthless, lazy lout! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? All the more reason to deposit my money with the bankers, so that on my return I could get it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the servant with ten. To those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing; even what they have will be taken away. Throw this worthless servant into the darkness outside, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:14-30

hour week at a \$15 per hour job, a worker today earns around \$30,000 per year. At \$30,000 per year, earnings over 17 years round out to \$500,000, the amount the master entrusts to the third servant. The master entrusts the first servant with five times that amount, \$2,500,000.

The master in Jesus' parable is not giving the servants a pittance to test their trustworthiness to handle his affairs. They have received a windfall, like winning the lottery. The priceless windfall each of us has received is life itself.

- If you made the Forbes magazine list of billionaires, how would you invest for the good of the whole?
- What is one of the most valuable ways you have invested your life energies?

The word *talent*, although it refers to an amount of money, is the same word in English that refers to our personal abilities and gifts, to all our natural endowments and the qualities our families have nurtured in us. All of us have some artistic, athletic, and musical ability; some of us have distinctive gifts in various areas of capability. One can teach, another administer, another inspire others.

Both the first and second servants in the gospel receive amounts of money equal to the earning of one or more lifetimes. This fact and the double meaning

What gifts are ours to multiply?

The talent the gospel parable talks about is an amount of money, not a personal ability or aptitude. One talent is equivalent to 6,000 denarii. One denarius was a day's wage for the ordinary worker in Jesus' time.

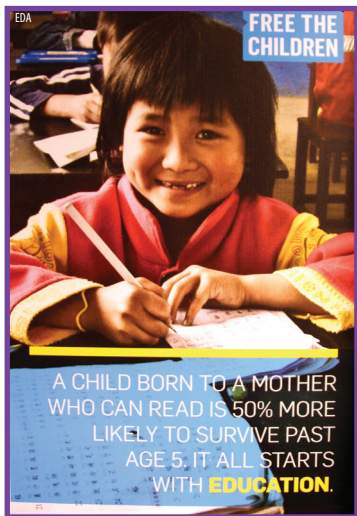
Anyone who worked six days a week for one denarius each day earned 340 denarii a year.

To be entrusted with one talent is to have at one's disposal the earnings of an ordinary laborer for 17 years. The five talents the first servant receives would take 85 years for the ordinary laborer to earn.

What might be a wage today comparable to the one denarius per day a laborer earned in the first century? Working a 40

of the word *talent* urge us who hear the parable to identify the money amounts with all that God entrusts to us in giving us life, unique gifts, and family and friends whose lives we share.

We each have life without having caused ourselves to be. Our ancestors have invested themselves in relationships and efforts that bring us to be. Jesus invested his life in the human race, identifying with us totally unto death, opening to us all we can become in God. How do we use these extravagant



down payments on ourselves? Sunday's parable calls us to multiply the gifts entrusted to us.

- **What do you entrust to your children or those you nurture?**
- **What does Jesus entrust to us?**
- **What talents as Christians are ours to multiply in our time?**

The parable of the talents follows the rule of three, which is familiar in folk tales and jokes. This rule for plotting stories sets up a pattern

Canadian Craig Kielburger founded Free the Children to mobilize young people to help end child labor. Today he leads Me to We Days with his brother Marc to promote service learning and help the 57 million children in our world not yet in school. Visit We.org.



in two events or two characters which a third event or character breaks. The rule of three focuses the point of the story on the exception to the pattern.

In the plot of Sunday's parable three servants receive huge but different sums of money. The first two servants set up a pattern; both immediately invest the money and double it. The third servant breaks the pattern by going off and burying the money.

At this halfway point in the parable, the servant who has received the least money, as suited his ability, has done the least with it. None of the three have squandered their money. The parable doesn't tell us why the third servant buried the talent, nor how the first two so easily doubled theirs.

When the master returns, the first two servants again set up a pattern which the third breaks. Both announce they have doubled the money entrusted to them. Both receive the same praise and promise of future responsibility. The master welcomes them into his joy.

However, the parable focuses on the third servant who, when he faces the master, finally

articulates his motives for burying the money. His failure to invest the money was not his fault, he says, but the master's. His master's harshness and readiness to take what was not his made the servant too afraid to use the money.

The master in the parable has no sympathy for the third servant's fear or blaming but condemns his laziness and orders him cast outside the community of joy to which he has welcomed the two other servants. The servant who already has ten talents gets this man's one.

- **With whom in the story do you identify—the servants who risk their talents or the one whose fear paralyzes him?**
- **How have you experienced fear shutting people down at work or inhibiting you at times?**
- **What or who has helped you overcome fear and invest your gifts in family and community?**

What qualities make relationships work?

The Old Testament description of the capable wife from Proverbs 31 is a favorite first reading at weddings and sometimes at funerals. As Sunday's first reading, this passage inventories very concretely how wise and faithful women in ancient times invested themselves in husband, family, and household.

The Church reads only 8 of the 21 verses about the capable wife. Sunday's passage emphasizes her relationship to her husband, her domestic skills, her openhandedness with the poor, her awe of God.

The passage omits verses that describe the ideal wife as a business woman, buying fields and planting vineyards, and making and selling clothing. It omits her laughter, wisdom, kindness, and enjoyment of her children.

Except that most women today no longer spin and weave, the description of the capable wife still largely applies. Contemporary readers may want to describe the ideal husband as well or wrestle with how to support each other's relationship with God and with people in need.

The Capable Wife

Who can find a strong wife? She is more precious than pearls.

Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, will lack nothing. She does him good, not evil, all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax and makes cloth with skillful hands. She puts her hands to the distaff; her fingers ply the spindle.

She opens her hands to the poor and reaches out to the needy.

Charm is deceptive, and beauty perishable.

The woman in awe of God is to be praised.

Give her a share in the fruit of her hands; let her works praise her at the city gates.

Proverbs 31.10-13,19-20,30-31

- Which qualities do you value in women today?
- What new demands do women face today?
- What are the qualities of the capable husband?
- What characterizes healthy relationships between husbands and wives in our time?

PRAY

Make personal beatitude statements as a prayer to conclude your scripture reflection. For example: Blessed are those who take time to help their children take their first steps. Or, blessed are those who invest themselves with families who have someone in hospice. Use the prayer below to conclude.

ALL: Strengthen us to invest in all the people you love, Jesus. Keep us in your lasting joy. Amen.



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DO SOMETHING



- Visit un.org/sustainabledevelopment for updates on actions around the globe and ideas for personal actions.
- Go to the USDA and explore eligibility for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs). Who does SNAP help?
- Read *Laudato' Si'*, chapter one, "What Is Happening to Our Common Home?" Pope Francis's exhortation is available online.

GIFT ALERT

Make December brighter, more prayerful with the *Advent Names of God*. Seven images and prayers rooted in Israel's longings for a messiah, reimagined in our evolving cosmos today.

Order at
goodgroundpress.com

