

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

How Many Gifts?

Reading the *Parable of the Talents* makes me think of all the teachers I've known, and most of all I remember the ones who made me think I had gifts that could be developed. There are good and bad and indifferent in every profession. Some teachers, I am sorry to say, have an instinct to dominate and belittle. They are men and women who are attracted to being in charge of people, but not very fond of the people themselves: or perhaps they are afraid of them. These teachers you remember with pain and a heavy heart: they delivered to you the message that you were not a lot of use, and would be better off elsewhere.

"You Can Do It!"

Most of us, happily, can remember a different sort of teacher, whose gifts were all at our disposal, and who gave themselves for us. They were encouraging, kindly people who reflected back to us a confidence and hope - maybe hope we could never have for ourselves - and that was enough to make us try hard, and discover our own gifts. Why were they so different? Because they had had the experience of being encouraged and affirmed themselves, and knew how important it is; because they had the imagination to see us better or cleverer or more skilful than we were at that point; because they themselves knew how to live in hope, and how to help us to hope.

The Virtue Of Hope

Like all virtues, hope grows the more you exercise it. It's a divine gift, like all other sorts of holiness; but it grows through human exercise, like all sorts of strength. You can get to be an habitually hoping person by searching out the growing-points, learning to recognise the signs of promise; and by developing inside yourself that register of hope which God has written in you. If you have good hopes for yourself, you won't find it so hard or strange to hope on behalf of others. If, on the other hand, you grow cynical about yourself, and put aside your relationship with God's astounding promises

of eternal life and joy, then the disappointing life you wish upon yourself will embitter your attitude to others too; and you may become negative, and blight the future simply by failing to hope for anything good or beautiful.

"If You Don't Want To Know..."

...Look Away Now!" I reckon they should put a notice like that on the television news. Every now and again, amid the sharp noses of magnates and financiers, and the carefully made-up features of would-be political heroes, a face gets through that calls out to your true self. An anxious child is being hurried through the crossfire, a helpless old woman being bundled onto a lorry, and suddenly you spot the reality, and the heart takes a sudden lurch, and you are involved. Is that the sign of a talent? I think so. You can't discover anything more vital in yourself than the power to love; if you've got that, you'll do! We must look to one another for the capacity to love, to be a giver, to make room for one another. That's what my good teachers did: they made room for me in the adult world, in the world of learning and of trust and of mutual respect.

What Jesus Said To Martha

"You worry about so many things, and only one is needed." How many gifts did God give you? Five? Three? *Only one is needed.* Maybe there are more gifted people to right and to left of us. But that isn't the point. If we have that one talent that Mary had, and Martha hadn't time to notice, it would be enough for us to *enter into our Master's happiness.* Thank God for those teachers who look at a dull little child, and see the gift that lies hidden, and begin to tease it out into the open (which is what *educate* means). Thank God for the virtue of hope, which turns us into live wires, charged particles, movers and shakers of the blind seed in the claggy soil, people who have winter in their eyes, but a harvest in their hearts and minds! When I go on holiday, I always hear a sentence at Church that stays with me. A priest said this year: *The Harvest*

*isn't ours; it's Christ's harvest. Let us use his
gifts, and hope for him. Fr Philip*