

An Irreplaceable Talent

I'm assured the common meaning of *talent* depends completely on today's parable; in itself it means nothing except a measure of money in the Roman Empire; we have translated it into something else: a human capacity. This can be used for any and every recognized way in which a person seems gifted...or just *marketable*.

Realism and the Gospel

I think the Gospel is never closer to reality than in the parables of Jesus. Yet there is about each of them a twist in the tail, a way in which reality *breaks open* into the unexpected, the unpredictable. And that makes it realer than ever, because real experience is always doing exactly the same thing; we go through our lives in a series of shocks and surprises, and what is needed to live well is not a crystal ball that helps us to predict, but that mysterious and deep quality which is called *wisdom*, and which is only to be had as a gift from God:

Wisdom -God's Gift Of Self

This is the difference between the winners and losers in the world of the parables. We saw: it last week in the bridesmaids' story, and this week we will see it in the story of the three servants. Getting it right, doing justice: it might be in great things (five talents) or in lesser (one talent). The quantities don't matter, only the principle. The first two servants "get the hang of it" and hit the ground running; the last servant misses the whole point, and fails the test. The unmentioned difference, the critical element, is that *the first and second servants share them mind of the master*., whereas the third is on another planet, and returns to his employer with nothing but a gratuitous insult (*I heard you were a hard man*) and an embarrassing closing balance (*nil points*). To accuse a master of "reaping what he had not sown", when in fact he had invested a considerable sum of money, shows the depth of the servant's misunderstanding. Now, it 'seems to me' that the wisdom of God, as we have had it revealed to us down the ages in Scripture, in tradition, and in history, is

in such contrast with "the wisdom of this age", as Paul called it, as to be almost contradictory. And this shouldn't

surprise us. When God sent his Word to us, we crucified him as unfit to share the same earth with us. This violent opposition between God and the embattled world has never been resolved; that is why we are promised that, when the whistle is finally blown, the world will end in fire. Whatever is to survive that conflagration must be made fireproof, as it were, by belonging to God's side of the divide *now*. This is what Wisdom is about.

"Your Faith Bears Testing By Fire"

- another of Paul's phrases, when he tells us that *our faith is more precious than gold, because it is indestructible*. There is wisdom: a divine gift, living at home in an earthen vessel (me), and making my earth, into something precious. That is why it is also *irreplaceable*; there is no gift or blessing or possession that can make up for it or stand instead of it. *How do people live without it?* Well, by inhabiting an alternative universe where they don't need it. That is the universe, bereft of God and closed to his purposes, his promises, or his judgment, into which '---' Eve ventures in Genesis, contemplating the ~ fruit that God had forbidden. It's the same world in which a great number choose to live today; they are served in this by media, commerce, power, politics, and all who live by and for them. That is the universe which the Bible calls *the world* (as in *the flesh and the devil*) and which has about it one damning blemish: *it is coming to its end*. Its inhabitants may reply: *O well, so are we all*. There is the classic unwisdom, measuring the meaning of life by the fact of death. As the Church nears the end of her year (thirteen days away) Christ recalls us to our vocation, reminds us of our role as believers - *and genuine investors* -in a divine future, not a worldly one. *Fr Philip /*