

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
ST. HELENA CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA
NOVEMBER 15, 2020

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's representative to the United States, I greet you in his name and express the closeness of Pope Francis as you gather on this Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as the Feast of the Vietnamese Martyrs approaches. I thank Msgr. Joseph Trinh for his kind invitation. I had the privilege of gathering with him and many Vietnamese Priests last year in California.

At that time, I noted the contribution of Vietnamese Catholics to the Church in the United States, not only among the clergy, but in the dedication of the lay faithful to the mission of evangelization and in the handing on of the faith to subsequent generations. Thus, I could say, and, I repeat it now, that a contribution of Vietnamese Catholics to the Church in the United States is that they strengthen the Church's catholicity.

As the Holy Father wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

"The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have one cultural expression, but 'rather remaining true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.' In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the 'beauty of her varied face.'" (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 116)

Thus, I would say Vietnamese Catholics, while preserving their own cultural heritage and liturgical traditions, are able to live the faith as an expression of a gift received from God, even in the United States.

Today's Gospel deals with gifts and talents. In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells the story of three servants to whom their master entrusted his property, before setting out on a long journey. The "talent" was an ancient Roman coin of great value, which became synonymous with personal gifts, which all are called to develop. Two servants behaved well, doubling the value of what they had received. Unfortunately, the third buried the money he had received in a hole. On his return, the master asked his servants to account for what he had entrusted to them. While he was pleased with the first two, he was disappointed with the third.

We should consider firstly the remarkable trust that the Master has in the servants. He gives freely to each according to his abilities. The word *dýnamis* is used in Greek for abilities, which refers to Christ's power at work within us (cf. 2 Pet 1:3-4). The Master represents Christ; the servants are the disciples; and the talents are the gifts that Jesus entrusts to them. God trusts us with His gifts.

These gifts represent the riches that the Lord has bequeathed to us as a legacy, so that we may make them bear fruit: his Word; Baptism, which renews us in the Holy Spirit; His Mercy and forgiveness;

the Sacrament of his Body and Blood; and, in the case of the Church in Vietnam, the precious legacy of the suffering Church and the blood of the martyrs such as Andrew Dung Lac, Vincent Liem, Agnese Le Thi Thành, and so many others.

God has given us many gifts, but what have we done with them? Have we accepted our responsibility? Jesus wants to teach his disciples to make good use of his gifts. God calls every person and offers talents to all, at the same time entrusting each one with a mission to carry out. In the parable, the first two set off to their task to fulfill their responsibility immediately; there is a sense of urgency.

The third servant, while often called lazy, does not have a sense of urgency; it is not that he is lazy. He is paralyzed by fear of his master rather than imbued with confident trust. Fear is the wrong attitude: the servant who is afraid of his master and fears his return hides the coin, and it does not produce any fruit. This fear betrays his lack of faith in his master's goodness. When comparing what the three servants did, all three set out and all three did some work. The first two traded and invested, but the third man, dug and hid.

Digging and hiding the talent may actually have been more work than making a trade; however, the difference lies in the attitude the servants have toward their master. The first two trust and love their master. They make their master's goal their own; they are united in heart and will with their master and are willing to take risks for him. The third servant, in contrast, is concerned about himself, his own security, and survival. He does not carry out his master's program, but his own. Pope Francis would say that he is "self-referential." He does not go out of himself or show any initiative in developing the gifts of his Master.

What if the Church was like that and did not go forth as a missionary Church, concerning herself with only her own preservation? What will happen when the Divine Master returns? What type of account will be rendered?

In contrast, Saint Andrew Dung-Lac, whose parents were pagans and who grew up in poverty, became a priest because a catechist to whom he had been entrusted from infancy shared the gift of faith. Becoming a priest and missionary, he brought the Gospel of salvation to his fellow Vietnamese. At his canonization, Pope John Paul II said:

"Saved from prison more than once, thanks to the ransoms generously paid by the faithful, he desired martyrdom ardently. 'He who dies for the faith rises to heaven; on the contrary, we who continuously hide, we spend some money to withdraw ourselves from our persecutors. It would be much better if we allow ourselves to be arrested and to die.' Sustained by a great zeal and by the grace of the Lord, he suffered martyrdom by decapitation in Hanoi on December 21, 1839." (POPE JOHN PAUL II, CANONIZATION HOMILY, 19 JUNE 1988)

He did not hide in fear! Sustained by the grace of the Lord and the zeal of the Holy Spirit, he boldly went forth. This is the legacy of the Vietnamese Church – to be bold and to be faithful! He went forth because he loved his own people. Imagine if the one talent you were given was love and you buried it!

In commenting on today's Gospel, Saint Gregory the Great noted that the Lord does not let anyone lack the gift of his love, writing, that "it is necessary that you pay the utmost attention to preserving love in everything you must do" (*Homilies on the Gospel*, 9, 6). After explaining that true charity

consists in loving enemies as well as friends, he added: “if someone lacks this virtue, he loses every good he possesses, he is deprived of the talent he received and is cast out into the darkness”.

In his beautiful reflections *Testimony of Hope*, the Venerable Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan wrote:

“One day in prison, I was asked, ‘Do you love us?’

‘Yes, I love you.’

‘But we have kept you in prison for so many years, without trial, without a sentence, and you love us? That’s impossible! Perhaps, it’s not true!’

‘I’ve been with you many years, you’ve seen it’s true.’

‘When you are free, won’t you send your faithful to burn our homes, to kill our families?’

‘No! Even if you want to kill me, I love you.’

‘But why?’

‘Because Jesus has taught me to love everyone, even my enemies. If I don’t, I am no longer worthy to be called a Christian.’”

This is the gift – the power – that has been handed on to the Church in Vietnam and which you now hand on to the Church in the United States: the power to love. You have first received this love from the Divine Master, who was not afraid to lay down His life for you. Now it is your turn to seize the initiative and to be spiritual entrepreneurs, multiplying God’s love in the world. God has given us many talents, many gifts; let us now accept our responsibility to be missionaries of His love, so that when the Master returns, He may say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master’s joy.”