

33A How heavy is God?

This may sound like a weird question, because we do not associate God as having any weight, after all He is in heaven, where those sorts of measurements do not exist. But this question comes from two thoughts: the first has to do with the talents in the parable: a talent was a measure of gold by weight; and also from a concept in Hebrew that springs from it (and that a contemporary reader might connect the ideas) the Hebrew for 'weight' and for 'glory' is the same word.

Nowadays we can access our bank accounts with cards and smart devices. Even a pile of £20 notes is not particularly heavy. But in ancient times there was one principal measure of wealth, things had value according to their equivalent weight in gold or silver. Units such as 'sterling', 'gold standard' or 'carats' indicate the weight, and therefore the value, of a precious commodity. A 'talent' was a large unit, 58.9kg. This week the price of gold is about £1450 per ounce. That is somewhere in the region of 20kg. So, 1 talent would be around £3m in today's gold market. It's not just that the owner gave his servants £15m, £6m and £3m respectively; The weight of gold would require a few camels to carry it all.

The link between the heaviness of the talents and the glory of God resides in this word-play on the word 'kabod'. Kabod literally means "to be heavy". The glory, or 'kabod' of God was to be found in the holy of holies in the temple. That was where God's heaviness was. If God has this 'glory' even though He is an intangible presence, it gives Him what we can only compare to the Real Presence in the Tabernacle. That is where God 'is'. We accept that God is all around us, in nature, in every person, in the Scripture, in the other six sacraments, but God's 'kabod' for us is in the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. Certainly that is what I miss when I enter a non-Catholic church. There is something not there. It is too 'light'.

So, we have been entrusted with one, two, maybe even five talents. What are they? The 'talents' we have is the grace of God. Although it does not have pounds and ounces, it is still weighty stuff. This is stuff that belongs to God, and He chooses to share it with us, to entrust us with it for His sake. When you have been asked to look after something very precious by someone, what are you going to do with it? God gives us a good and a bad choice here. His grace is not something fragile to wrap up in cotton wool, or even, as the third servant did, to bury in the ground, instead it is

something that we are entrusted with for us to use, and to make it grow and bear fruit. And just because the owner of the talents (God) is away, and may not be back for a while, there is no time for complacency and for misuse of his property. His grace is still his. We are merely sharers in it. And being sharers in God's life and work, we have an interest in it.

That is the problem of the third servant; he is not interested in the talent, so he buries it, forgets about it (well, he still knows where he buried it) and gets on with his own life and his own business. Even when he is confronted, he makes the feeble excuse that he was frightened (of failure?) which is why he buried the talent. If he was truly frightened, he would surely have done something with the talent. No, he is not interested in his task, and he has been found out. He has realised too late that it was worth taking a different path than the one he took. The saddest bit is that he was given a talent, which he chose to waste. Many would hunger for that, who do not get the chance. That is ultimately why he is cast out into the darkness. Since he has rejected the gifts he was given, they have been taken off him that is all there is left.

Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if there was, say, another servant who had been given some talents but had been unlucky, making a loss through no fault of his own. That seems to be a very pertinent point just now. Many people have lost livelihoods, jobs, investments due to the pandemic. The travel and hospitality sectors are on their knees. They have invested, and are getting no return, and even what they put in is being taken.

How would the "hard man, who reaps where he does not sow, and gathers where he has not scattered" deal with that? And is that how God is with us if we try but fail? I think the answer comes in the concept above: is that person interested in God's life and work, even if he seems to be unsuccessful? I would like to think that God would say to that hard-working but unsuccessful servant, "Its Ok, don't worry. Here is another talent, lets see how you do this time. Use it but don't hoard it. Do the best you can with it, and I will help you to make it work out". With God's help we should be more successful than if we strike out on our own

The central take-home message here is that it is God's grace that we are entrusted with, and we have been given so much that we can share it with others. We can try to share it, to use it for good, to make it grow, and that is what we are asked to do.