

We are not meant to live poorly. There's a deliberate ambiguity in that sentence because neither are we meant to make money in order to make more money. This *Parable of the Talents* is subtler than it seems and leads one commentator to argue that it is the third servant who is the honourable one because by burying his master's wealth in the ground he has put an end to his master's quest for further riches, to his insatiable greed. In the context of the other parables here, near the end of Matthew's gospel, and the liturgy's use of today's passages from Proverbs and Paul, this does seem a little anachronistic – putting an honourable but present concern into a passage which has another overriding purpose. Something of this charge is also made of Pope Francis's encyclicals where the concern, for example in *Laudato Si*, may seem, at first, to be the environment but his real concern is the economy in which the rich grow richer and the poor become poorer, or is this, in turn, simply being synchronistic: just citing another text and idea which happens to be in one's own thinking and reading? Well, let's see. Matthew and Paul live in apocalyptic times when the value of their lives will be revealed. *What has it all been for?* one might say. But we don't have to evoke apocalyptic times to make this question relevant. We, all of us, always live in danger of death; in this light the passages from Proverbs can reassure us that the *Parable of the Talents* is really asking us what it means to live well and although, as in the parable, this at first seems to be about securing one's present life in terms of wealth, it's primarily about the virtue of wisdom, that is, knowing God's will and love for us now and allowing that to be our guiding light. So one could say that, even the straight equation of 'talents' with 'talent' can miss the mark, if we don't also understand that this isn't primarily about the use we make of our 'natural' gifts as much as about our knowledge of God: that is, the security we derive from living within the ambit of God's love. Being unafraid, in this sense, will allow us the freedom to love others, and ourselves, as well as God does. Now, this is the investment in which we will be examined at death, and it may, of course, include a critique of our master's riches, as well, of course, as our own. But, then, none of us is in a position to judge our own worth. We can trust God to do that for us. Who's life is it, anyway?

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