

Homily - THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITY – R. Vincent Gartland

The story of the talents that Jesus told has been used for decades to talk about talents and sharing them with others. It is sometimes used to talk about contributing more to the church either financially or through volunteer services.

I would like to suggest that we look at it a little differently today. Let's look at it as a story of lost opportunity. All of the servants were given a great opportunity to invest their master's wealth. Unfortunately, one failed to take the opportunity, and it is clear from the ending of the story, that he lost out big time.

The story of lost opportunity reminds me of another similar story of a woman who lived all alone by a river. During one particularly heavy storm, the water began to rise and it came up to the steps of her house. The county sent by a truck to pick her up and take her to safety. "No thank you", she said to the, 'Please get into the truck.' "I believe in the Lord and the Lord will save me."

It didn't take too long for the water to rise to the second floor. When it did a boat came by to rescue her. "No thanks," she said, "I believe in the Lord and the Lord will save me." Finally, she finds herself perched on the chimney of her house with water all around. A helicopter comes from overhead; they lower a rope and tell her to fasten herself to the rope and they will pull her up. "No thanks", she says, "I believe in the Lord and the Lord will save me." Just then a wave knocks her off the chimney and she falls in the water and drowns.

At the pearly gate she meets the Lord. First question out of her mouth was, "What happened Lord? I believed that you would save me and I drowned." The Lord looks at her and says, "I sent you a truck, a boat, and a helicopter. What more do you want?"

I believe the recent presidential elections have given us all a tremendous opportunity for change and for hope. Hopefully, we will not let this opportunity pass us by.

Fear and a sense of impossibility have taken root in this country like a virus. As a country we are not in the greatest shape to simultaneously fix a shrinking economy, a withered government, a consuming involvement in war, and an ailing planet. But we have no choice. This is where we find ourselves. For us as Catholics, as Christians, as citizens of the United States of America, we must cooperate in working together for the common good. This is not a choice, but an imperative.

In his speech last Tuesday evening after winning the election, president-elect Obama said, "I ask you to join me in the work of remaking this nation, the only way it has been done in America for the past 221 years: One brick at a time, one block at a time, one callused hand at a time."

We, you and I, need to be the agents of the change we hope for. We need to bring about the change we hope for. This means: cutting our own spending, eliminating waste, volunteering our time for non-profits, increasing by a bit, the food we bring for the poor each month. In small steps, we can bring about the change we hope for. But this will require tremendous cooperation. More than we have ever seen before.

To the sayers of doom I say, "Practice the Virtue of Hope and pay close attention to this Advent Season when our prayers and our readings challenge us to be people who live in hope." We don't need negativity. We never have and we never will, but most especially at this point in our history; we can't afford you.

What we need now more than ever are people who look out for the common good. It is not about me and my issues; it is about a nation of good people working to reclaim all that America stood for to our grandparents and great grandparents, who came here from all over the world to build a nation, under God, with freedom and justice for all.

On Wednesday morning, the day after the election at 6:00am, I received a call from a friend who had just returned from teaching a class of 400 students at the University of Padua in Italy. He said he began the class by saying, "Today is a great day", and the whole class erupted in applause. This election has engendered hope all over the world. This is an opportunity we cannot squander.

In this Wednesday's New York Times, there was a full page ad stating, *PEACE IS POSSIBLE* from over fifty Arab and Muslim Countries. Now no one is naive. There is no doubt that there are differences with the United States in these countries, but they are recognizing, at least, that there is a possibility, a great opportunity to move toward peace. There is not agreement on every issue, but there is so much we do agree on. So let's start there.

There is no one way to achieve our goal. There are many different ways all leading to the same goal. Let us build this nation. Let us be open to the many different ways we can work together in building our nation and our world. Be open to others and their many different ways of approaching a problem.

Let me be candid. Certainly, for us as Catholic Christians, abortion is a big issue. But we must always keep in mind that the goal of the anti-abortion movement is to end abortions, not to change a law. Abortions will be stopped by changing the conditions and culture in which abortions flourish. This is the real challenge, and it is a much greater challenge than changing a law. Certainly, changing the law is an important step, but it is only one step. Hopefully, we can work to create a culture where a law is no longer necessary. We can do that by working against poverty, war, broken family relationships, economic instability, poor or no health care, lack of adequate housing, lack of opportunity. These are the conditions in which abortions flourish.

Let's stop yelling at one another; let's stop judging others; let's start respecting one another; let's start supporting one another as we work, each in our own way and with our own gifts and priorities at making this nation (and the world) a closer reflection of the Kingdom of God, for certainly in the Kingdom of God, abortion will be a non-issue.

Let's start using common sense and work for the common good.

Each and every one of us is being given a great opportunity in this very critical point in history: an opportunity to set aside our differences and work together supporting our national leadership in every way we can, to create a nation that moves a bit closer each and every day to the great vision God has for us. One brick at a time, one block at a time, and one callused hand at a time can bring our country every day, a little closer to being the Kingdom of God. And before you know it, we will be there.

Deep in my heart, I do believe, we will overcome the fear and darkness and evil that surround us, and we will be that community of light, the children of light, as St. Paul calls us in the second reading. We will be a beacon of hope for all the world. Dream with me, work with me, and pray with me for the coming of God's Kingdom, for the fulfillment of God's dream for all of us in our day and in our time.