

When I was discerning the priesthood in college, I heard Pope Benedict XVI quote Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, a young Italian man who died from polio at the age of 24 and is currently on the path to canonization—he's truly an amazing man and I encourage you to learn more about his life if you haven't heard of him before.

The Holy Father quoted Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati who said, "***I want to live, and not simply exist.***" Now as a senior in college, these words reverberated in my heart and they rang so true with me in my deepest desires as a young man and my vocational discernment towards the priesthood. As a 22 year old at the time striving to discern the loving will of God in my life, ***I wanted to live and not simply exist*** and I truly believe that in my vocation as a priest, God has shown me my path to the fullness of life, which brings happiness, peace, and freedom. Whenever we freely embrace our vocation and follow the will of God, Who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves, we will truly be happy and at peace.

Brothers and sisters, to live life to the full in accordance with God's will and ***not simply exist***, is to heed our Lord's words in today's

Gospel and use our God-given gifts and talents to the best of our ability with the necessary help of grace—all for the sake of God and others! In fact, our gifts and talents are meant to glorify God out of love for Him and we do this when we selflessly serve Him and others in joy and humility. From the wealthiest celebrity to the most unknown person on main street, *all of us* are called to use our gifts and talents in a way that glorifies God and upholds the dignity of every human person.

I'll never forget when the Eagles won the Superbowl in 2018 and then-MVP Quarterback Nick Foles was interviewed immediately after the game and this dude could've said anything—with a microphone in his face, he had the attention of the whole country and the whole world and he could've used his platform to say *anything*. Without missing a beat, with great humility and joy and with his baby daughter in his arms, this Superbowl champion exclaimed, "*All Glory to God!*" This was someone who clearly loved God, was not ashamed of God, and therefore sought to glorify Him *in public* with his own gifts and talents! What a great example and role-model for all disciples of Christ!

While our God-given gifts and talents may bring earthly fame and glory, these are *not* the ultimate reasons for our gifts and talents. While not intrinsically evil in and of themselves, earthly fame and glory can be two false gods that lead us away from Christ and ultimately leave us empty, miserable, and unsatisfied. In an age of social media where many try to attain fame and glory for themselves, we need to be reminded that we were not created for earthly fame and glory, but rather we were created for the *Heavenly glory of sainthood*, and that doesn't always make us popular or win us fans, "likes" and Twitter followers.

Rather than use our God-given gifts and talents in a selfish and prideful way, we must ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to humbly die to ourselves and use our gifts and talents for the sake of God and others, always seeking to glorify Him by serving others in love, joy, courage, and compassion. We can certainly use our gifts and talents to lead others to truth, goodness, and beauty and to help them grow in holiness. Our gifts and talents can be used to serve God and others in countless creative ways—all of which should help build a civilization of love and a vibrant culture of life that celebrates truth, goodness, and beauty.

So *we* have a good idea as to what talents are to us, but what is a “talent” in the context of Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel? It’s not what we typically think when we hear the word “talent.” However, the modern notion of God-given talents as natural aptitudes or skills is derived from the parable in today’s Gospel. In the English language, we use the word “talent” the way we do *because* of today’s Gospel, even though in 1st century Roman Palestine at the time of Jesus, the word “talent” was referring to a sizeable sum of money, most of which was represented by a coin. So at the time of Jesus, a “talent” was an ancient unit of weight and value, normally that of metals such as silver and gold. So a talent could be compared to a pile of treasure. The Hebrew talent was about 75 pounds or 35 kilograms—that’s a lot of silver and gold!

Now in light of that, there’s a temptation to interpret this parable in a *purely* materialistic way as if God is talking solely about money, but *He’s not*. This parable is wide in scope in terms of its application in our lives and so there are many good ways one can interpret this rich parable. For one, we must *never* waste our God-given gifts and talents, but rather always cooperate with the grace of Christ and use our gifts

and talents well in the service and love of God and others. One of my favorite movies is *A Bronx Tale*, starring Robert de Niro and Chazz Palminteri. One of the great lessons that the young main character named “C” recounts is that “the saddest thing in life is wasted talent.” That fits perfectly with Jesus’ parable in today’s Gospel.

We all have gifts and talents from our Heavenly Father. Do you know yours? If you honestly don’t know what your gifts and talents are, ask the Lord in prayer to show them to you or ask others who know you well to identify them for you. Once we identify our gifts and talents, we’re invited to lovingly and humbly ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to properly use them in service to Christ and others.

Another lesson from today’s parable is that it honestly doesn’t matter *what* gifts and talents we have or *how many* gifts and talents we have—what matters is *how we use the gifts and talents we have* to love and serve God and others! What matters is that we cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit and use our gifts and talents to grow in holiness! In this parable, our Lord Jesus is speaking about the need to respond to

His grace, which is the spiritual treasure He gives us, and to lovingly keep that effort up our whole life long!

Brothers and sisters, the greatest gift and talent given to us is ***Christ Himself***, our Savior, who gives Himself to us in His Church, Her sacraments, and in prayer for the sake our salvation and eternal happiness! ***The greatest talent that God gives us is Himself***, His own divine life in the form of sanctifying grace, which we receive through the sacraments, most especially the Holy Eucharist, the greatest visible Gift on earth! There is no greater tragedy than to reject and waste ***this Gift of Christ Himself***, along with all of the other ***lesser*** gifts and talents that come from God and are meant to love and serve Him and others!

It's pretty clear from today's parable that ***God can't stand laziness!*** In today's Gospel, Jesus refers to the servant who buried his talent as "the wicked lazy servant." This servant is wicked ***because*** he is lazy and he's lazy ***because*** he has allowed fear to enslave him. Fear, pride, and sloth (which is spiritual laziness) can prevent us from using our God-given gifts and talents in a fruitful way! Fear, pride, and sloth

can prevent us from using the greatest Gift and talent of all, Christ our Savior, Who came so that we might have life and have it to the full!

With the help of divine grace, may we *truly live, and not simply exist*—may *nothing* stop us from living life to the full by using our God-given gifts and talents in a fruitful way that glorifies God and lovingly serves our neighbor. If we use our gifts and talents in a way that helps us to grow in holiness and live the Gospel, then at the end of our life, we will hear the same words of Christ to the good servants in today's parable: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy."