

Homily based on the readings from August 30, 2025 (1 Thessalonians 4.9-11; Matthew 25.14-30)

As we all know, it has been almost four months since the election of Pope Leo. Although he has yet to make any high-level appointments or issue any substantial documents, we are beginning to get a sense for what his pontificate will be like. One of the earliest clues, of course, was the *name* he selected. Even though there have been *numerous* noteworthy popes named Leo, many people surmised – correctly, as it turns out – that our Pope Leo chose his name primarily in reference to Leo XIII, who reigned as pope from 1878 to 1903.

In many ways, one can view Leo *XIII* as the first pope of the “modern age.” He was the first pontiff in over a thousand years never to rule over the Papal States – the independent country administered by the Church, which was absorbed into the Kingdom of Italy in 1870. He was also the first pope, and possibly the earliest-born human being, to be filmed by a motion picture camera. His pontificate was memorable for a number of

reasons, one of which is that he took an unprecedented interest in the United States. He was, for example, responsible both for sending Mother Cabrini to New York City and for founding the Catholic University of America.

Among his numerous accomplishments, what most people remember about Leo XIII is one specific document that he authored – a papal encyclical known as *Rerum novarum* (“*Of new things*”), which was issued in 1891. This text is generally considered to be the foundation of modern Catholic social teaching. It clearly lays out – in language that is just as powerful today as it was 134 years ago – the evils both of atheistic socialism and of unfettered capitalism. Underlying all these arguments, though, is a simple yet profound principle: work is not just a means of providing material support for ourselves and our families, but a tool for ensuring the dignity of the human person and for participating in God’s saving mission. To quote Leo XIII, each of us must employ the gifts God has given us “as the *steward* of God’s providence, for the *benefit* of others” (22).

It is essential that we recognize the difference between the gifts we receive from God and those we obtain from our family and friends.

Whenever a loved one gives us something, the general expectation is that it belongs to us and that we can do with it as we please – even returning it for store credit, if we like. The same is *not* true for the gifts that come from God. They are not playthings, or even necessities, but *obligations*. God expects us to use everything he gives us – our intellect, our strength, our health, our wealth – in his service, for the betterment of our brothers and sisters. In an absolute sense, we do not *own* anything – not even ourselves. Each of us has been entrusted with a particular set of responsibilities, for which we will be required to provide a reckoning.

That, of course, is the entire point of today's Gospel reading. The master is not giving talents to his servants for their own benefit, much less their own entertainment. Failure to invest the talents is not only lazy, but selfish. Every gift we receive from God has a particular purpose – a person it is supposed to help, a service it is supposed to

perform. If we keep these talents buried – whether out of cowardice, indolence, or indifference – we are depriving other people of the benefits they are supposed to receive. On the other hand, if we trust in God – using what he has given us for the *purpose* for which he gave it – then we too will *finally* come to hear those blessed and joyful words: “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”