Today, we're going to unpack a very intense gospel about judgement. After an earlier mass, am man came up to me and said, "My wife heard you read the gospel and turned to me, and said, 'This one's going to need an explanation!'" I will do my best. In today's gospel Jesus tells a parable of a master who entrusts his possessions to servants and goes away for a long time. St. Thomas Aquinas puts these trusted possessions or gifts into two categories. We are given "natural" gifts, intelligence, strength, personality, youth, abilities, etc. These are gifts that are part of our human nature. We also have "supernatural" gifts, the gifts of grace, humility, faith, hope, charity, etc. Supernatural gifts elevate us to eternal life.

We learn from the parable that not all the servants receive the same number of gifts. Some of us have more or less of these natural and supernatural gifts, but we all have some of them. Take a moment to think about what natural and supernatural gifts God has given you. Remember, as the parable says, these gifts are God's possessions and not our own. In making us, God gave us His own image and likeness. Like the servants in the parable, this comes with certain responsibilities.

When the master returns, he takes account of what each servant accomplished with their "talents" or gifts. On one hand, we have good servants, one who doubled his talents from 5 to 10 and another from 2 to 4. See that the master responds identically to each of the good servants, saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities." The master doesn't look at the total return of the first servant over the second and adjust his praise. He looks into each of our hearts and discerns our effort to do His will with the gifts He's given us.

Now we turn to the third servant, we call him the "lazy" servant. This servant turns on his master and accuses the master of not only being demanding, but of harvesting another man's field, and lacking integrity. The master calls out the flaw in this servant's logic and says, if you thought I was unfair, why didn't you at least put my money in the bank to gain interest?" Through this he uncovers the servant's laziness. The problem with the lazy servant is his unwillingness to accept the responsibility of holding the master's possession. He holds onto the gift, but in a way that bears no fruit. This happens when we think of God's gifts as our own and not something entrusted by Him.

We see that some servants pleased the Lord, while others did not. It begs the question what sort of guidance did the master provided before going on his journey? The answer is present in our first reading from the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs begins with 10 speeches from a father to a son on how to live a life in accordance with God's plan. It also includes four poems and hundreds of proverbs covering work, family, friendship, forgiveness, alcohol, marriage, etc.

Proverbs provides both knowledge and skills to successfully navigate our time on earth. The Jews used the word, "Khokhmah (hok mah)" to describe one who internalizes both knowledge and skill, a term used for a craftsman who applies the knowledge of a trade with the ability to

build something pleasing to his master. For us, this is utilizing our natural and supernatural gifts to create good in our lives, work that is pleasing to God.

The last chapter in proverbs, 31, applies all the wisdom in the first 30 chapters to a woman who is a worthy wife. Think of a block of marble, and use the wisdom and skills identified in Proverbs to create a beautiful statue of a woman, we name the worthy wife. This woman has everything God is looking for. "Her value is far beyond pearls." Pearls were extremely rare in ancient times since they were all natural and found only in oyster shells at the bottom of the sea. This preciousness speaks to importance of spiritual khokhmah (hok mah) that leads us to holiness and eternal life.

The worthy wife, "Brings her husband good and not evil all the days of her life." Applying the wisdom of proverbs, she thwarts evil from life and brings goodness to all situations.

The worthy wife is industrious; she takes the elements of wool and flax and makes them into clothing. This is like taking our natural and supernatural gifts and weaving them into meaning and purpose. "She reaches out her hands to the poor and extends her arms to the needy." She remembers those in need and distributes some of her profits to them.

Finally, she's not focused on charm or beauty but fears the Lord and is praised for her virtue. "Let her work praise her at the city gates." This asks us to call out publicly the respect that is due to the virtuous who speak the truth and live the gospel.

Now I'll share a story from David Guzik, a Protestant Pastor. A man in the middle of many painful trials took a walk in his neighborhood and saw a construction crew at work on a big church. He stood and watched a stone craftsman work a long time on a block but could not see where the block would fit, because the church appeared to be finished. He watched the man work on the block carefully and methodically, slowly shaping it into a precise pattern. Finally, he asked, "Why are you spending so much time chipping and shaping that block?"

The craftsman pointed up to the top of the nearly completed steeple and said, "I'm shaping it down here so it will fit in up there." The man in the middle of the trials instantly knew God's message to him: He was being prepared down here so that he would fit in up in heaven. God leads us through the ups and downs of life and sees each an opportunity to become more like the worthy wife, to embrace His gifts and use them to find our way to heaven.

To summarize, we are given natural and supernatural gifts, we take time to know them and recognize their source, our Father in heaven. We develop our khokhmah (hok mah), our knowledge of Proverbs, the gospels, and all the messages of scripture, and the skills to use God's gifts to further his kingdom on earth. We do our best to live a life of integrity and generosity and hope for success and peace as we become like the worthy wife in the last chapter of Proverbs. Over time, we multiply God's gifts through our humility and hard work and share them with those in need. In doing so we become good and faithful servants and share in our master's joy both on earth and in heaven.