

# You've got talent

I AM writing this article at the end of an incredible run of sporting events: the World Cup in South Africa; the Tour de France and the end of an era for Lance Armstrong; the most exciting and driest Wimbledon in years; and the controversy over Fernando Alonso's win in the German Grand Prix; and, of course, Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralitharan's 800th wicket in his final test match in the game of cricket, which was supposedly first played by monks.

One is naturally very aware that those participating in sport and entertainment have a gift. They have talent, a word we can trace back to the Bible. Jesus told of a businessman who went on a trip leaving three of his servants – staff might be a better word – with a gift to increase in value during his absence. They were given five, two and one talents

respectively. A talent, which comes from the Greek word *talenton*, meaning a unit of money, indicated that it was a fair amount of cash. The first two multiplied their talents during the businessman's absence; the third wrapped his in a cloth and buried it. A wasted talent, yes, but let's not be too critical. I know there is a heavenly meaning to this parable, but just taking its earthly side, there would have been a lot of empathy for his action during the recent financial crisis. Many might have thought it a better bet to place their money under the mattress than put it into the bank.

From that story we get our word *talent* which means a gift of natural ability. Did you manage to see the film *Billy Elliot*? It is a brilliant fictional story about a young boy brought up in an English northern

town in the 1980s. His dad expects him to take up boxing, but he shows no sign of being a Manny Pacquiao. His real talent is ballet dancing which, to say the least, is not highly regarded by Billy's family and schoolmates. It's a great story about someone whose hidden talent is spotted by one of his instructors, who encourages him to persevere in the face of much opposition and derision. His brilliance is eventually not only recognised by ballet fans, but by his community, and above all by his coalminer dad who had previously disowned him.

Last year you may have been one of the 116 million people who watched Susan Boyle on You Tube singing on the show *Britain's Got Talent*. When she came on stage the audience laughed at the appearance of this dumpy-looking person. But

after she sang a few bars of *I Dreamed a Dream* you could see a wave of confusion sweep across the audience, followed by expressions of guilt and then incredible applause. This was no fictional story. Here was someone who had long been laughed at for her ambition and maybe even her nature. But Susan Boyle knew the gift – the talent – that was within her. She knew before the audience and the world got the message.

It is true that many of us will not play football like Kaká or sing like Pucelli, but we are all in many and different ways "gifted children of God". Importantly, we need to recognise the gift of life itself, the gifts of goodness, truth and love – gifts that we can't earn or buy. So surely the least we can do is to unwrap them and put them to good use. Got talent? Of course you have!