

**16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 3/16, 2007**

II CORINTHIANS 6: 1-10

ST. MATTHEW 25: 14-30

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel.... For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not

strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Speaking And Teaching In Different Ways

Throughout the Gospels the Lord many times speaks in different ways in order to get His message across. Quite often He couches His lessons for us in parables; these make the teaching stand out and arrest our inclination to laziness when we listen.¹

The Main Thrust Of The Parable

The key today is Christ wants to illustrate the suddenness of His Second Coming. We don't know the hour or the day, so we must be ever vigilant; *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh* (St. Matthew 25: 13). He could even come at the unlikely time of midnight!²

We Are Trustees Of Christ's Gifts

The "man travelling into a far country" is Christ. He is about to leave [in the Lord's case by Ascension or a lengthy time period that he will be long-suffering and wait for us to spiritually 'flower']. He calls His servants, bishops, priests and deacons, and gives them the call to go forth and minister the Word. He gives them variable spiritual property which they are to be held accountable for the fruits coming therefrom. If the trustees of His spiritual property (all of us) act aggressively to benefit others as well as ourselves, we can double the value of what we are given (like the one who received five talents and gained an extra five and the other who received only two talents but also gained an additional two), but the one who hid the gift showed he only cared for himself and had not thought of anyone else, so "he is condemned".³ Eventually, we are required to answer, to account for what we have received.⁴

Not All The Gifts Are The Same, But The Spirit Is

The Lord gives us varying gifts:

His own servants are the teachers of the Church, that is, bishops, priests and deacons, who have received **in trust** (emphasis supplied) the service of the word and the grace of the Spirit, some in greater measure,

others lesser. Now there are diversities of gifts, as the divine Apostle says, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discernings of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally (note: individually) as He will.⁵

Isn't this wonderful? All of us receive different gifts from the Lord. We have responsibility for them to Him because everything is His! But this diversity is truly diversity not the sham kind we sometimes experience in secular life where diversity may end up being in fact the very discrimination it theoretically is intended to eliminate!

Double Benefit Vs Total Loss

We are all members of Christ and receive our gifts according to our abilities:

But every man receives a gift according to his ability, that is, in the measure of his faith and purity. God pours out His grace to correspond to the vessel which each of us presents to Him. If we present a small vessel, we receive a little grace; if a large vessel, we receive great grace.⁶

Whatever gifts we have been given by Christ, we must use carefully, energetically, enthusiastically. We must not hide our talents the Lord gave us. Our grace He conferred on us should shine. Our talent is not to be buried as the one did in the parable thus indicating he cared only for himself. We are to labour on the right road toward salvation of ourselves and of others:

Thus also everyone who has received grace must endeavour to double it. To double it means to gain benefit for one's neighbour. He who strives to teach his neighbour, or to benefit him in some other way, gains even greater profit for himself that he does for his neighbour; he receives a double reward.⁷

The two who doubled their spiritual ‘returns’ are equal in God’s eyes:

He that received five talents and he that received two are deemed worthy of the **same good honours** (emphasis supplied); for when a man has received even a little, yet uses well the gift given him, however small it may be, he will receive equal honour with him who was allowed to administer many and great things. Each one possesses perfection according to the measure which he has received, if he strive well; for although the gifts are diverse, the honour is still equal, in that each one doubled what he had received. Or else, to put it another way, they are equally praised, and equally brought in (to the joy of their lord), but they are deemed deserving of different rewards, according to the measure of what they have received. Furthermore, other prudent servants act in the same way, and are likewise counted worthy (of rewards;) but the wicked and lazy servant answers differently, in a manner befitting his wickedness. He calls his master a hard man... But in calling his master a hard man, the servant ought to have been more diligent, as one (in service to) a hard and severe master...⁸

Both were good stewards of their individual gifts. The one who received two talents excelled in his trusteeship of the smaller gift. Both were the good servants. They reaped what they sowed, double spiritual returns; whereas, the unprofitable servant “forfeits the gift itself”. If we are diligent, we will show a profit in our good deeds and receive greater grace. The Lord’s work requires diligence, no diligence, no gift!⁹

Let’s all be vigilant! We do not know the time of the Lord’s Second Coming, but we must make ourselves spiritually ready for His Coming. We will have to account for our gifts as His trustee. Act aggressively in handling the talents given to us by Christ. Think of others as we are stewards of His property. Be diligent in receiving and taking responsibility for our diverse gifts. God gives us gifts according to our abilities, i.e., according to our faith and purity. Don’t disappoint Him! Double any grace received by striving to teach our neighbours spiritually or assist them in other ways. All those who double their spiritual returns are equal in God’s eyes no matter how small the original gift. Remember if we hide our gifts and are negligent in our custodianship, we forfeit our gift of grace. Bring vigilantly and diligently whatever gifts you have to Christ’s Table!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba), Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 407.

² Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 214-215.

³ *ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴ *id.*

⁵ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 408-409.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 409.

⁷ *id.*, p. 410.

⁸ *id.*, pp. 412-413.

⁹ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218.