

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew (25:14-35; II. Tim. 2:1-10)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

A missionary pastor once asked me, this was back when I was a protestant, “What is your spiritual gift? Prophecy, preaching, evangelism, teaching, laboring, what?” The question caught me off guard. I wasn’t prepared to answer it, nor did I know how to answer. Nevertheless it’s a question we could all ask ourselves. What are the gifts God has given to us? Are we evangelizers, teachers, singers, organizers, what?

How do we even know what our gifts are? When that missionary pastor asked me not only did I not know what my gift was, I didn’t know how to begin discerning what it might be. Truth be told, since our gifts come from God are for each other we discern them by participating in the life of the Church. The Church teaches what our gifts are.

Each of us is given a valuable gift according to our ability. A talent, in the Gospel, is great sum of money, but for us ‘talents are each person’s ability, whether with finances, teaching, singing, or ministering to others’ⁱ But these gifts are given to us that we can multiply them for the benefit of our salvation and the salvation of those around us. Very one is given something by God, and we figure out what that something is by coming together and being the Church.

Now in today’s parable the man who ‘hides his talent in the ground essentially is occupying himself with purely earthly matters. He is not seeking spiritual profit; he never lifts his hearts above worldly considerations.’ⁱⁱ He doesn’t heed St. Paul’s word’s that “no soldier on service entangles himself in the affairs of this life.”

St. Gregory the Great says of this man that ‘He is a figure of many in the Church who are afraid to live a better way of life.’ These are those who are afraid to partake of the chalice because of their sin, but not afraid enough to better their lives. “They tremble to approach the way of sanctity, but they are not afraid to persist in their vices...”ⁱⁱⁱ

But they, and so are we, are without excuse, because we have each other around us and the saints who are ready to help, just like the man in today's Gospel. The lazy servant could have followed the example of the good and faithful servants and gone to the traders or the bankers in order to turn a spiritual profit. So too can we go to one another for help in turning a spiritual profit. And that takes work.

Now, the parable goes "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man traveling to a far off country..." In other words, Jesus Christ Himself, the God-Man, after his death and resurrection ascends to the far country of heaven. But before he goes imparts talents to His Apostles, and even unto us. These talents are a renewed humanity; freedom from sin and death, and the Holy Spirit. The talents He has given us are His words, his love, His faith, and the Church. In other words He has given us Orthodoxy. So we cannot bury these talents because they are the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

The parable continues, "After a long time the Lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them..." See this parable is right smack dab in the middle of Christ's discourse about the end, the tribulation, the coming Antichrist, and the second and glorious coming, of which we know not the hour. So this parable is about being prepared to settle accounts with God by feeding hungry, giving drink to the thirst, bringing in the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the prisoners. Above all, we settle accounts, not by burying what the Lord has entrusted us with, but by taking them, and according to our abilities turning a spiritual profit for ourselves and each other.

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ⁱ St. John Chrysostom

ⁱⁱ St. Gregory the Great in *The Bible and The Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, 376.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.