

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
November 16, 2014

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The parables of Our Lord Jesus have their own dictionary of definitions. Whenever it is said the master (or nobleman, or king) “goes away into a far country” that means Christ leaves us to ourselves. He does not interfere with our good *or foolish* actions. We are placed in a state of probation and are being tested.

Why does Christ use parables? It is because the kingdom of God does not easily fit into human conceptions of it. The kingdom is both very far off and very close, *all at the same time!* Christ has *ascended* to prepare a place for us. He has also *remained with us* in the life of His Church. In her sacraments He guides and nourishes us with His very Presence. In point of fact we live in the period *between* the first and second coming of Christ. It is a period of waiting while Almighty God still hides the full and glorious manifestation which will mark the end times.

How are we to live in this middle period? The answer is given in one of the messages in the Parable of the Talents. While God hides His hand, as it were, He has given us grace, and we are to do something with it! Jesus tells us in the parable that we are to *add* to the graces given us. What we had is called *merit*.

The Parable of the Talents reveals something about this doctrine of merit. We have been told here (and in other parables) there is something in human action which can earn us Christ’s approval. The master says “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*” This approval always involves a right use of the graces Christ has given us. And as in the parable, we are given graces in varying quantities as is best for each of us. It is not that you or I should worry or feel slighted if another disciple is given five talents while we are given one! In the same way a barrel of oil is full and a cup of oil is also full, Christ fills each of us with what we need to follow Him in the vocation He has given us.

In an age where the password is equality and inclusivity, it seems a surprise to many we were all created *different*. And you can thank God for that! What a boring place it would be if every one of us could run a four-minute mile, or had the glamorous looks of Veronica Lake, or were all chess champions! When the Blessed Virgin Mary was declared “*full of grace,*” that was divine recognition of her unique capacity for grace. But there was also her *need* of grace because of her

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vocation as Mother of God. And we recognize Our Lady's capacity and need were different than yours or mine.

The only equality that matters is God is our creator and loves us all. *And His love for all does not diminish in any way His love for each.* The third servant in the Parable of the Talents had forgotten or missed that most important fact. His nose was out of joint because he had only received one talent. He already felt slighted and didn't want to risk public ridicule. So what did he do? He took his talent and did not expose it to any risk of losing it. He thought it safest to hide his grace in the ground and bring it back when the master returned. And to show this kind of thinking is off the rails, when this man was asked why he had not added to the graces given him, he said it was because he knew his master to be a hard man! Where is the logic in that? If his master was indeed a hard man, it should have been all the more incumbent upon the servant to make something of what he had been given.

This servant was distracted by the numbers. He was worried about secular respect and the lack of it for himself because he had been given only one talent. *Worldly respect is the deadly enemy of heavenly merit.* God's reign is not about quality or equality as the world sees it. It is about *transforming grace*. In the eyes of the Only One Who mattered, this man's turning of one talent into two would have been perfectly acceptable. It would have earned him a *well done*. By putting his graces to good account, fresh graces would have been added as they were to the other servants.

The parable reminds us that small things do matter. In small ways we may be gaining or missing the opportunity grace offers. So we are told to be *enterprising* with God's grace. This is not a license to gamble! But we misuse grace when we just keep it. And then in the end even what we had is withdrawn from us.

All of us have read lives of the saints. There is a common theme. It did not matter whether the saints had abundance or lack of worldly materials. The saints were so busy *sharing their lives* for the profit of Christ they had no time to worry about keeping score. In their lives of ungrudging service to the Lord Jesus the saints

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show us the way to live. And the Lord can use servants like that *anywhere, anytime.*