

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
November 15, 2020

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Parables have their own dictionary of vocabulary. It is coded language. Whenever Our Lord Jesus says the master or nobleman or king “went away into a far country,” that means Almighty God leaves us to ourselves. Most often He does not interfere with our good or foolish actions. A human lifetime is a state of probation and we are being tested.

Christ used parables for a reason. 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. This is a period of waiting while Almighty God still hides the glorious manifestation which will mark the end times.

How then are we to live in this middle period? The answer is 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 grace. In the parable Christ tells us we are to add to the graces given us. What we add is called *merit*.

The parable reveals something about the 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. That is indicated when the master says: “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*” Approval always involves a right use of the graces Christ has given us. In life, 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.

People so often clamor for equality. So it is a surprise for them to learn we were all created *different*. And thank God for that! What a boring world it would be if very one of us could run a four-minute mile, or had the peek-a-boo looks of Veronica Lake, or were all chess grand masters. When the Archangel Gabriel declared the Blessed Virgin Mary “full of grace,” that had as much to do with her *capacity for*

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*grace* and her *need* of it, because of her vocation. And we recognize that both her vocation and need were different from yours and mine.

The only equality that matters is that God is our Creator and loves us all. The third servant in the parable had forgotten or missed that point. His nose was out of joint because he had only received one talent. He felt slighted by that and so didn't want to risk public ridicule. He thought it safer to hide his grace in the ground and bring it back when the master returned. And to show how this kind of thinking is off the track, when this man was asked why he had not added to the graces given him, he replied it was because he knew his master to be a hard man! Where is the logic in that? If true, that should have been all the more incentive for making 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 him since 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 values them, but about *transforming grace*. In the eyes of the Only One Who mattered this man's turning one talent into two would have been perfectly commendable. It would have earned him a "*well done.*" And by putting his graces to good account, fresh graces would have been given him, as they were to the other servants.

So the parable reminds us small things do matter, and that in small ways we may be gaining (or missing) the opportunities grace offers us. Our Lord tells us to be *enterprising* with God's grace. That is not license to gamble! But we misuse grace only when we just keep it. Then, even what we had is taken away.

All of us have read lives of the saints. And it did not matter whether they had abundance or disadvantage. The saints were so busy sharing their lives for the profit of Christ they had no time to worry about keeping score. In their very different circumstances the saints show us a common theme of ungrudging service to the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus can use servants like that *anywhere, anytime.*