



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

Spiritual Investing
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. (Matthew 25: 14-15)

The Parable of the Talents has been appointed for us to hear on this 16th Sunday after Pentecost. It is one of several final parables told by our Lord and recorded in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, where the first evangelist has gathered together those parables that deal with the final, ultimate things: the return of Christ, the final judgment, the rectification and retribution of all things – and the way in which we should prepare for it.

The word "talent" in this context refers to a sum of money, a relatively large sum of money if you were to compare it to our own currency. The context of the story is that of a property or estate owner who gives his servants various sums of his own money – not as gifts, but as responsibilities: He entrusts his servants with the responsibility to invest that which he gives them. Unless we understand this, we will miss the point of the entire parable. He chooses three of his servants in the same way that we might choose financial institutions like banks, or Fidelity Investments or UBS to invest his money and make it grow. The first two servants do so, with mixed results, but each of the first two does his duty and makes

what their master gives them grow. The third does nothing; indeed, less than nothing. He buries the money in the ground and attempts to defend himself with the explanation that he is frightened.

At the end, of course, the master returns, checks on his investments, and determines that the first two servants did their duty, but the third did not. He gives what he had originally entrusted to the third, to the first. The Lord explains: *For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away* (vs. 29). If one investment service does not take the responsibility seriously when we entrust our money to it, then we will reinvest it with the one that does. This is the way it is with the Kingdom of God.

The talents in this parable do not represent gifts or skills or qualities with which we were born. They represent responsibilities, duties. And the parable is directed particularly at those who have been entrusted with the talents, the responsibilities, to do their duty in light of their call to serve. This applied of course in the time of Jesus to the entire People of Israel, whom God had called out of all the nations of the earth to bear the message of salvation – not just to themselves, for to all peoples. In the time of the Holy Apostles it obviously was applied to the responsibility of the Church. The Church does not exist for its own sake, for the comfort of those who lead or who belong. The Church is like a light set upon a table, for all to see, for all to be enlightened by its message of hope, and charity and compassion for all.

This message is clear to us who are members of the Church in this age. The multitudes have left us. We have been reduced world-wide to a remnant of what once was. Still, our responsibility remains. We are to proclaim Christ, crucified and risen, and draw people into His net of salvation. Salvation – which means ultimate health and wholeness through union with God – is only possible when we are in communion and service with and for others. There is no such thing as individual salvation. God has entrusted us with the responsibility to share and proclaim and demonstrate by example the great Gospel of forgiveness appropriated through repentance and borne by the Word and Sacraments of the Church. If we are laypeople, we practice lives of service to others in our families and circles of friend, in the workplace, striving to fulfill our duty by living Christlike lives in charity. If we are clergy, we do our duty in humble service, without seeking payment of any kind, without striving for honor or recognition. If we are monastics, we practice prayer and obedience. These are the talents we have been given; these are the responsibilities God has entrusted us with.

This message is not particularly warm and fuzzy, is it? But it is the message that the parable bears. And remember how it ends: we, all of us, will be held accountable. Let us pray, Brothers and Sisters, for the grace to be faithful in the performance of our responsibilities, our duties. Let us be like the first two servants, who took what was given and carried out their responsibilities dutifully!

Fr. Elias

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