

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS
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Vienna, Austria, Cathedral of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker

In the Parable of the Talents a man is going on a journey to a far country. He gives one of his servants five talents, to another two and to the third he gives one. He gave these talents, which are monetary units, to each of his servants, so that they would invest them in order for the talents to multiply and bring profit. The one who received five talents invested the money and while his master was absent the investment brought a profit of five talents. The same thing happened with the one who had two talents and they brought a profit of two more talents. The one who received one talent buried it in the ground, where it remained until his master returned (Matthew 25:14-30).

What is the meaning of this parable? First of all, the Lord gives talents to everyone — to some five, to some two and to others one. Although the measure of the talents given to each person may differ, there is no one who is deprived by God and is not given something that he can use for the benefit of God and for his neighbors. The sum of a man's life is based on how he used the talents given to him. The starting points may vary from person to person, but the final result depends not on how much a person was given in the beginning but how he used these gifts.

Let's take a look at our church — the altar, the iconostas, the furniture and the stained glass windows. This majestic church was built for the glory of God by people who wanted to use the talents which they received from God for the glory of God. The man to whom the Lord gave the talent of being an architect designed the temple and made blueprints. The people whom the Lord endowed with the talent of being stone masons built this church so that it would stand for centuries. The iconographers who received from the Lord artistic talent painted the icons which have been preserved until today and remind us of the saints of the Old and the New Testament Church. None of these things appeared by themselves. They are the work of people who used their talents for the glory of God.

This church would not have stood for as long as it has and there would not have been a service today if people had not come here for decades who readily offered their talents for the building and continuance of a church community. The Divine services can take place here because there are people who are willing to contribute to their church their abilities, energy and spiritual strength. Priests labor here who serve God according to their strength, perhaps overcoming natural human infirmities which are connected with old age and illnesses. Deacons serve here who help to create a prayerful mood during the celebration of the Divine services. Subdeacons and altar boys serve here who, in spite of their young age, offer their abilities and add to the grandeur of the church services. Choirs sing here, and not only one but two or three, which consist of people who are willing to offer their abilities to create the Orthodox Divine services. Therefore, it is because many people have willingly offered their talents for the work of the Church that this church is still standing today and that the Divine services have been served here up until today.

It is the same thing in the world. The world exists until now because of the people who were willing to work and to contribute their talents for the necessary things without which the world cannot exist. We are required to not be like the man, who having received his talent, buried his talent in the ground. Many people who are generously endowed with talents by God either do not use them at all, use them only to benefit themselves or use them to cause harm. The majority of them do not recognize that their talents were given to them by God, thinking that they acquired them by their own efforts. Such people do not understand that they were given their talents in order to use them for good and not for evil. Some examples: there are musicians who write music which corrupt people and make them depraved; there are artists who paint and draw immoral pictures; there are writers who write books which corrupt minds. We shouldn't be like these types of people. We should use the talents given to us by God in a

useful way, for God's work and in order to help our neighbors. Being Christians, we are called upon to be active members of the Church community, using what God has given us to help the Church with her work and her needs. Therefore, if you have a good voice, then sing in the choir, sing unto our God, imitating the angels who praise Him day and night. If someone among the youth feels inclined towards the altar, to serve in God's church, then become an altar server. If someone aspires to serve as a priest, apply for seminary, graduate and then go to the bishop and request ordination. Remember the words of Christ: "The harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37).

Every one of us must contribute all of our abilities and our energy in order to create families and to raise children. The Lord will not ask us much about our sins and shortcomings, but we must be prepared on the Dread Day of Judgment to give an account about how we raised our children, what we gave them, what we taught them and were we able to pass on to them the true faith. Therefore, the Lord calls each of us to that service which is given unto us and calls us to that work which we fulfill, to be creative so that here too we can fully make use of those talents that are given to us by the Lord.

Let us remember that the Church of God stands, is preserved and grows thanks to our labors, our willingness to contribute our abilities and our talents for God's work. Let us remember that God's world stands and grows only as long as people are willing to contribute their abilities and talents. Let us remember that the end of the world will come, as the Lord said, when "the love of many has waxed cold" (Matthew 24:12). In other words, the end will come when people stop contributing their talents. Let us value, cherish and not waste the days, the months and the years of our lives, remembering the responsibility which God has placed upon us with the innumerable gifts given unto us by Him.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen