

You cannot be too gentle, too kind. Shun even to appear harsh in your treatment of each other. Joy, radiant joy, streams from the face of him who gives and kindles joy in the heart of him who receives. All condemnation is from the devil. Never condemn each other. We condemn others only because we shun knowing ourselves. When we gaze at our own failings, we see such a swamp that nothing in another can equal it. That is why we turn away, and make much of the faults of others. Instead of condemning others, strive to reach inner peace. Keep silent, refrain from judgement. This will raise you above the deadly arrows of slander, insult and outrage and will shield your glowing hearts against all evil.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Sunday 10 February 2013 is the Sixteenth Sunday of Matthew

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let everything in heaven rejoice, let everything on earth be glad, for the Lord has shown strength with His arm; by death He has trampled on death; He has become the first-born from the dead; from the belly of Hades He has delivered us, and granted the world His great mercy.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: James 2:14-26; Mark 6:54-56, 7:1-8
Hieromartyr Blaise, Empress Theodora

Tuesday: James 3:1-10; Mark 7:5-15
Meletius, Abp of Antioch; Antonius, Abp of Constantinople

Wednesday: James 3:11-18; 4:1-6; Mark 7:14-24
Martinian of Palestine; Apostles Aquila and Priscilla

Thursday: James 4:7-17; 5:1-9; Mark 7:24-30
Auxentios of the Mountain; Cyril, Apostle to the Slavs

Friday: 1 Peter 1:1-25; 2:1-10; Mark 8:1-10
Onesimus of the 70; Righteous Anthimus

Saturday: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-23; Matthew 24:34-37, 42-44
Martyr Pamphilus and Companions; Flavian, Pat. Of Constantinople



Archbishopric of Good Hope,
Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa

Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

10 February 2013

Using our talents

Today we hear Jesus Christ's teaching on the parable of the talents from St Matthew's Gospel. Jesus tells us of a man who went on a journey. Before he went away, he entrusted his property to his servants. One of them received five talents and used them to earn five more. Another received two talents and used them to earn another two. However, the third servant, who was entrusted with one talent was too scared to do anything with it and instead hid it. When his master returned he was rebuked for having wasted his opportunity.

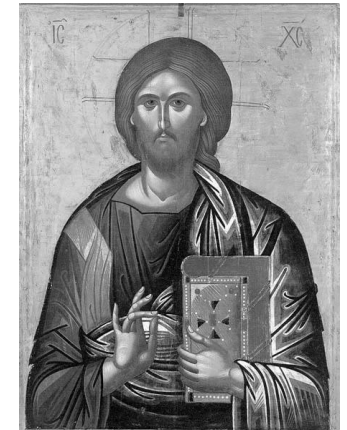
The Fathers of the Church understand the man who distributes talents as Jesus Christ. He has given different gifts to all of us, and He calls us to use these gifts in an appropriate way in order to carry on His work.

Many of us find it difficult to use the gifts that we have been given because we have come to see ourselves as worthless. We may wonder what we could possibly have to offer to God. Yet the Church teaches that we are all of inestimable worth in the eyes of God, for we have been created in His Image and He has loved us from the beginning. Moreover, He calls each of us by name, and it is our task as Christians to respond to what He is asking us to do with our lives.

Often when people do not use the gifts that God has given them, it is because of fear. It is not ill will that keeps them from responding to God, but rather because they have become prisoners of fear. We might be inclined to feel sorry for such people and be shocked at how stern the parable is towards them. We all have fears, but when we allow them to dominate us, they take over our lives, prevent us from being the people whom God intends us to be, and lead us on a path to destruction. We are called to confront our fears and, with God's help, to overcome them.

The Lord who dispensed the talents returns to demand an account, because He who now generously bestows spiritual gifts may at the judgment inquire searchingly into what was achieved; He may take into account what everyone has received and weigh up the gain we bring back from His gifts.

Saint Gregory Dialogos



THE CHURCH YEAR

We saw last week that the Church's calendar is not simply an arbitrary collection of details and rules, but that it exists in order to hold before us the central events of our salvation, and to offer us the opportunity to enter more deeply into the reality of our faith.

THE PASCHAL CYCLE : A FAITH CENTERED ON THE RESURRECTION

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ lies at the very centre of our faith, and so the celebration of Pascha, or Easter, lies at the very heart of the Church's year. Everything else finds its origin in the Crucified and Risen Christ and revolves around the events of Pascha. We therefore speak of the Paschal cycle, which is the most fundamental cycle of the Church's year.

The Paschal cycle begins with the period of preparation for Pascha, namely Great Lent. And it continues after Pascha in the fifty days of Paschal celebration until Pentecost, and beyond that in the various Sundays after Pentecost. We can identify the following elements of Paschal cycle, all of which hinge around the Resurrection of Christ.



The Pre-Lenten preparation. Even before Great Lent begins we have three Sundays that prepare us for it, alerting us to the fact that something important is at hand. These are:

- The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee;
- The Sunday of the Prodigal Son;
- The Sunday of the Last Judgement.

These are followed by the Forgiveness Sunday, which is really the eve of Great Lent, which begins with Forgiveness Vespers on the Sunday evening.

The season of Great Lent is a time of intense preparation in order to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. In the early Church it was a time of preparation for new converts who were to be baptized during the Easter Liturgy, and today it remains an important time for refocusing on our relationship with God and for joyful repentance. On Forgiveness Sunday we recall the

casting out of Paradise of Adam, who represents all humanity. We are called to recognize ourselves in Adam and Lent is given to us as an opportunity to return to Paradise, for Christ comes to us as the Second Adam and by His Death and Resurrection He makes it possible for us to return to God.

Each of the Sundays of Great Lent have their own theme and particular characteristics, and they are intended to lead us to, and prepare us for, the events of Holy Week and Easter. In the very first service of Lent we hear its purpose:

Let us begin the Lenten time with delight ... let us fast from passions as we fast from food, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, that we may be granted to see the holy passion of Christ our God and His holy Pascha, spiritually rejoicing.

A soldier asked Abba Mius if God accepted repentance. After the old man had taught him many things he said, 'Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?' He replied, 'No, I mend it and use it again.' The old man said to him, 'If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about His creature?'

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Blessed is he that has eaten from the bread of love which is Jesus. While still in this world, he breathes the air of the resurrection, in which the righteous will delight after they rise from the dead.

St Isaac the Syrian

Question Box

If you have a question about the faith and teaching of the Orthodox Church, you can send it to evangelion@goarch.co.za

I would like to know if the Orthodox Church believes that the “communion bread” becomes the actual body of Christ, when administered by the hands of the priests.

The short answer to your question is “Yes.” Before we receive Holy Communion we pray: “I believe that this is indeed your most pure Body, and this is indeed your Precious Blood.” We accept Christ's words in St John's Gospel that “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person.” (6:56) In the Eucharist we receive the Bread of Life and the Medicine of Immortality which is for the healing of soul and body.

However, your words “when administered by the hands of the priests” could give rise to confusion. It is not simply at the moment that Holy Communion is administered to the communicants that the Gifts are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but during the offering of the Gifts during the *Anaphora* or Eucharistic Prayer. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church does not speculate on *how* the Gifts are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, nor on the precise moment of their transformation. We are content to accept St John of Damascus' words that “The Holy Spirit comes and makes these Divine Mysteries ... to be Christ's Body and Blood.” But during the Anaphora, we can note in the following moments at which the priest prays.

In the words of institution he repeats Christ's words “*Take, eat, This is My Body ... Drink of it, all of you, This is My Blood.*”

This is followed by the prayer: “*Commemorating the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the Enthronement at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming again ... Your own of Your own we offer You, in all and for all.*”

Then comes the Epiclesis in which we pray for the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ: “*Send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set forth: And make this bread the Precious Body of Your Christ, And what is in this cup, the Precious Blood of Your Christ, Changing them by Your Holy Spirit. Amen, Amen, Amen.*”

This transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy cannot be reduced to any one event, nor to anything which we can explain or grasp with our minds. Moreover, we do not simply pray that the Gifts will be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but also that the Holy Spirit will come upon us as the Church, for we cannot separate the Gifts from the community that celebrates and receives them.