

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



**7 February 2016 is the  
Sixteenth Sunday of Matthew**

**Matins Gospel:** Mark 16:9-20

**Epistle:** 2 Corinthians 6:1-10

**Gospel:** Matthew 25:14-30

**Resurrectional Apolytikion:**

Let the Heavens rejoice; let earthly things be glad; for the Lord hath wrought might with His arm, He hath trampled upon death by death. The first-born of the dead hath He become. From the belly of Hades hath He delivered us, and hath granted great mercy to the world.

**Seasonal Kontakion:**

Your birth sanctified a Virgin's womb and properly blessed the hands of Symeon. Having now come and saved us O Christ our God, give peace to Your commonwealth in troubled times and strengthen those in authority, whom You love, as only the loving One.

### ***Readings and saints for this week:***

**Monday:** Ephesians 2:4-10; Matthew 10:16-22  
Great Martyr Theodore Stratelates; Prophet Zacharias

**Tuesday:** James 3:1-10; Mark 6:1-7  
Apodosis of the Presentation; Martyr Nicephoros

**Wednesday:** 2 Timothy 2:1-10; John 15:17-27; 16:1-2  
Hieromartyr Haralambos; Anastasios, Patriarch of Jerusalem

**Thursday:** Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6; Matthew 10:1, 5-8  
Hieromartyr Blaise; Empress Theodora

**Friday:** 1 Peter 1:1-25; 2:1-10; Mark 6:45-53  
Meletius, Abp. Of Antioch; Antonius, Abp. Of Constantinople

**Saturday:** 1 Thessalonians 5:14-23; Matthew 25:1-13  
Martinian of Palestine; Apostles Aquila and Priscilla



# ***Evangelion***

*A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith*

7 February 2016

**Archbishopric of Good Hope  
Patriarchate of Alexandria & All Africa**

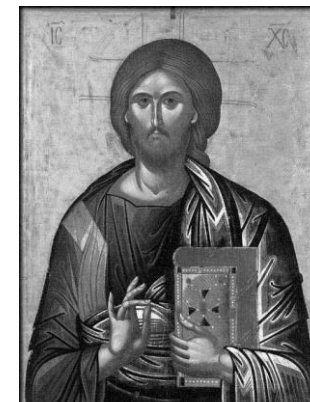
## **He who has Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear!**

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

## Saint Theophan the Recluse on Inner Peace

People concern themselves with Christian upbringing, but leave it incomplete. They neglect the most essential and most difficult side of the Christian life and dwell on what is easiest – the visible and external.

This imperfect and misdirected upbringing produces people who observe with the utmost correctness all the formal outward rules for devout conduct, but who pay little or no attention to the inward movements of the heart, and to true improvement of the inner spiritual life. They are strangers to mortal sin, but they do not heed the play of thoughts in the heart.



Accordingly, they sometimes pass judgments, give way to boastfulness or pride, sometimes get angry (as if this feeling were justified by the rightness of the cause), and are sometimes distracted by beauty and pleasure, sometimes even offending others in fits of irritation. Sometimes they are too lazy to pray, or lose themselves in useless thoughts while at prayer...

...Let us now take the case of one who has been falling somewhat short in the work of salvation. He or she becomes aware of this incompleteness and sees the incorrectness of their way of life, and the instability of his or her efforts. And so they turn from outward to inward piety.

They're led either by reading books about spiritual life or by talking with those who know what the essence of Christian life is, by dissatisfaction of their own efforts, by a certain intuition that something is lacking and that all is not going as it should be.

Despite all of his correctness, he has no inner peace. He lacks what was promised true Christians – peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.... He comes to understand that the essence of the Christian life consists in establishing himself with the mind in the heart before God in the Lord Jesus Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In this way, he is enabled to control all inward movements and all outward actions so as to transform everything in himself whether great or small into the service of God and the Trinity, consciously and freely offering himself wholly to God.



In spite of our sinfulness, in spite of the darkness surrounding our souls, the Grace of the Holy Spirit, conferred by baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, still shines in our hearts with the inextinguishable light of Christ ... and when the sinner turns to the way of repentance the light smooths away every trace of the sins committed, clothing the former sinner in the garments of incorruption, spun of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. It is this acquisition of the Holy Spirit about which I have been speaking.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov

Abba Macarius was asked, 'How should one pray?' The old man said, 'There is no need at all to make long discourses, it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, "Lord, as You will, and as You know, have mercy." And if the conflict grows fiercer say, "Lord, help!" He knows very well what we need and He shows us His mercy.'



Abba Zeno said, 'If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.'

Abba Nilus said, 'Prayer is the seed of gentleness and the absence of anger.'

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

### 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](mailto:evangelion@goarch.co.za)

#### Why do we need prayer books in order to pray? Why can't we just speak to God from our hearts?

Prayer does indeed involve an intimate sharing with God of what is in our hearts, and there are people who criticize formal prayers as being too routine. However, in doing so, they misunderstand the role of prayer in our lives.

Sometimes people say that prayer books are for beginners, but the point is that we are all beginners in prayer. Saint Benedict of Nursia tells us that in prayer we put our minds where our mouths are. By reciting the words, we are seeking to align our minds and our hearts with the words that we pray.

The prayers of the Church are there in order to teach us how to pray, and we need to try and pray them attentively. For Orthodox Christians, our understanding of our faith is intimately bound up with the Liturgy and with the other prayers of the Church. These prayers are in many ways the custodians of our faith. There is an enormous depth to them that it will take us a lifetime to learn properly and to make our own.

This does not mean that we should not pray to God spontaneously, or share with Him that which is in our hearts. We all have special needs and concerns that we should bring to God. However, we should be hesitant about dispensing with the prayers that the Church gives us and relying simply on what we feel, for our feelings can deceive us. We need a solid basis to lead us in to prayer, and to teach us what there really is in our hearts, and how we are to respond to it before God.