

Well done, My servant! (Mat 25:14-30)

* The old folks' saying, *So many countries, so many customs* is absolutely true; but in the area of people's actions this idea doesn't work; in this case, there are only two customary possibilities for everybody, that is acting wrong or acting right. Seeing ourselves as wrong- right doers acting under the influence of different motivations, we specify four possible variations of acting. First is, when we act rightly but with the wrong motivation. For example, we may contribute money to different institutions but with a carnal motivation - just because we may be praised by other Christians, (Mat 6:2). The second way of acting is, when God's people have good motivations but act wrongly. Think about the fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission, for example, (Mat 28:19). It is a right motivation to go to Algeria and practice the true discipleship among those people; but it is quite wrong to bring the social Gospel into play at the beginning, (John 6:26). The two mentioned possibilities seem not so bad if taken into account the third option that is the worse. Here we mean Christians who have been influenced by wrong motivations and acted wrongly. And the fourth option is, when Christians act rightly having the right motivation. Now for the good of our listeners and readers, we'll illustrate the two last options in detail. Our gospel reading, "*The Parable of the Three Servants*," (Mat 25:14-30) will be taken for the foundation.

* Now with these brief preparatory remarks, we address to the return of Christ the King. Unlike Advent, a time of preparation for the King Jesus who rescue his people from their adversaries and condemn the idle to eternal torment, today and the next Sunday we'll devote ourselves to the teaching of Jesus whom we expect as a Master. At his coming, he will call his servants into question. And what does the Master expect? It seems he wants us to repent and to be forgiven. He wants us to working out our duties diligently and wait for him watchfully, (1Thes 5:6-8).

* It is believed that in the passion week Jesus had laid emphasis on the teaching of the last things; particularly, they are the parable of "the Ten Virgins," "the parable of the Three Servants," and the description of the final judgment, (Mat 25). The theme of being watchful was the central point of the first parable. As you remember, the five virgins were called the wise because of their constant readiness for a bridegroom. On the contrary, another five young women acted foolishly because they acted passively doing nothing, and when the bridegroom arrived these five were not allowed to enter into the adornment of the Bride. The parable of *the Ten Virgins* teaches about being ready for Christ's advent as the imperative! However, it doesn't answer the important question, *What does it mean to be well-prepared or to be ready?* With this connection Jesus told us *The Parable of the Three Servants*, also called the *Parable of the Talents*. It equips us with the whole

knowledge regarding actions and motivations for the sake of our well-being. At this moment we also want to mention a similar parable from (Luke 19:12-27) - *the Parable of the Pounds*.

Scholars are not sure whether Jesus told these two parables or just one that later appeared in the two different forms. In either case, the general point is the same: *it is important to be the watchful and good and prepared servants for the Master's return!*

* At this moment let us turn back the clock and pretend as if we lived at the time that our story takes place. The story begins with a Master's preparation for a long business trip around 2000 years ago. It says that the Master entrusted his money to his three managers with anticipation of a double income after his return. He gave to the chief manager the five talents of silver as well as the two others managers - two talents and one talent correspondingly. The amount of given money was not bad at all if we take into account that 1 talent was worth of 60 minas or 6000 denarius. The value of denarius can be nearly calculated as a day's wage for a laborer, (Mt 20:1-16). The modern equivalent of the worth of a denarius in the US today is about \$ 80 per day. Therefore, 5 talents are equivalent to \$ 2,400,000.00; 2 talents – \$ 960,000.00; and 1 talent - \$ 480,000.00. As far as all things were set up, the Master went away for a long time.

* For a change we imagined ourselves in the place of those servants; it might help to better understand how this applies to us. In fact, our Master Jesus Christ has entrusted to us the work that he had carried on himself before his ascension to the Father. Friends, just determine the priceless talents we have been given. And what is that precious gift? Well, regarding the talents the traditional commentary says that the meaning of talents goes beyond physical things such as our money, professional skills, physical energy, time and so forth. Here we like to stress the spiritual things. Isn't it true that we cannot benefit the Church of Christ by our material possessions only? Otherwise, it would not be a true Church but a voluntary association. If you open your bulletins, here you will find the insert with a picture of a tree drawn on top. The tree bears 9 different fruits as you see. An apple represents love, a watermelon – patience, a tomato stands for peace and so forth; all nine are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. If there is no love shown among Christians, for example, there is also no Church, just only a nonprofit organization built by unfaithful Christians! The mentioned fruits stand for the fruits of the Holy Spirit we are supposed to yield like any good tree. However, our ability to do God's work depends from a power of the Holy Spirit we were given. Unfolding the figurative language of the parable, we understand that each of us were not left without a Heavenly treasure according to our personal abilities, (v. 15) - the five, two, or one measure of the Holy Spirit so that we would be able to build up the body of Christ, (Eph 4:12).

* Going back to the parable, it narrates the arriving back of the Master as he promised. Upon his return, he summoned the servants for an accounting. So, the servant who had received the five talents brought them

together with the extra five talents. "Master", he said, "You have trusted me with five talents; see, I have gained five more." So the next servant who was trusted with two talents also enjoyed his Master. In view of his servants good work made with the right motivations, the Master said, "You are good and loyal servants! Because you have been loyal with a few things, so I will make you responsible for many things. Come in and be happy with me!" At last the third servant showed up, but he didn't satisfy his Master's expectation as a good and thankful worker. The investigation confirmed that he acted wrongly under the influence of the wrong motivation. From the broader context we conclude that this servant had hidden silver underground being influenced by the carnal motivation. Moreover, the Master's return was not met with joy, rather with discontent and accusation. "Master", said the wicked servant, "I know that you are a severe man. You harvest crops where you have not planted. You gather where you have not scattered. So I was afraid. I went out and I hid your money in the ground. Here is all that belongs to you." Actually this statement was not correct regarding Masher's character; thus the parable says about the Master's exceeding generosity. He left his possessions, including income, to those who work hard for him. But the idle servant was banished from the Master's house forever, (v. 30).

* From the parable we've learned that God sees our acts and motivations attentively, *Have we used the natural and spiritual gifts in a proper way, or we have kept them for ourselves?* At the same time our faithfulness in service to Christ leads to more opportunities for service and to further blessings. Meanwhile unfaithfulness leads to the loss of the blessings with which one had to start. This principle can be seen over and over in the actual practice of our ministry in the life of the church. The (v. 30) of our text provides a further word of judgment against the "useless" servant. *"... throw this good-for-nothing slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* But it also gives further definition to the meaning of one's readiness. Those of us who are ready for Christ's second advent will be faithfully using all opportunities given us for building up Christ's Church. Failure to demonstrate such readiness will lead to terrible judgment when Christ returns.

Beloved, may God the Holy Spirit work right things through us if we long for doing the right things
with right motivations.

Amen.