

Dearly beloved: Christ is in our midst!

We probably have all heard or used the phrase “use it or lose it.” It means if we have an ability it’s good for us to use it otherwise, through lack of use, we’ll forget how to do it. Perhaps it’s speaking a different language. Then there are things like earning points for airfare or gas. If we don’t use them in a specific time period, they are lost to us. Even the ancients knew this and had a story about it. There was a Miser who took all his possessions and converted them into gold and buried the gold at the foot of a tree in his garden. Every week he used to go and dig it up and to look at it, gloating over it. A robber, who had noticed this, went and dug up the gold and carried it off. When the Miser next came to gloat over his treasure, he found nothing but the empty hole. He tore his hair, and raised such an outcry that all the neighbors came around him, and he told them how he used to come and visit his gold. One asked him “Did you ever take any of it out?” The Miser said, “No. I only came to look at it.” So his neighbor told him, “Then come again and look at the hole, it will do you just as much good because when you had your gold you had no use for it anyway.”

Jesus teaches us that something much more precious can be lost to us if we bury or neglect His gifts to us: the blessedness of eternal life with Him. Three servants received talents from their master to increase the sum while he would be away. Talents were a unit of weight and value with one talent weighing over one hundred pounds. The three servants received a great amount of money to invest. This parable is part of a series of parables our Jesus told about His coming again. Jesus told first the parable of the ten virgins awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom who came in the middle of the night while they were asleep. Only five of the virgins were wise enough to have enough oil for their lamps to see through the night. After today’s parable, Jesus tells us the one we will hear on Meatfare Sunday (the first Sunday of March this year), when Jesus will return and will sit as judge, separating the just from the unjust as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Throughout this chapter of Matthew’s gospel (the twenty-fifth) and the chapter preceding it Jesus focuses on our being prepared, summed up in his command, “Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” (Matthew 24:42)

All of this gives us the context for Jesus’ words to us today. It is about the master returning when the servants don’t expect it and it’s about how the servants deal with the sum entrusted to them by their master. Those who were about their master’s business, even though they didn’t know when he’d come back, these servants are rewarded. And the one who took the sum placed in his care and buried it is judged harshly and strictly, his talent taken away, while he is cast “into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.” (Matthew 25:30)

Jesus Christ blesses us in many ways, seen and unseen, and today’s parable is one of His blessings for us. What we need to do to enter into life in heaven is not a secret. It is not a mystery that we must look to the stars to discover, nor from psychics or palm readers. Jesus plainly tells us that like the servants in the gospel we, too, are entrusted with gifts by Him. We are made in His image, we have received the gift of faith, we have been baptized, we can confess our sins, we can receive Him in Holy Communion. We are blessed with material gifts as well, what we earn, the possessions we have. We are blessed with people in our lives whether spouses or children, friend and family. We have talents whether at singing or teaching or baking or numbers and many, many more. All of these are gifts to us through God’s mercy.

And, in His human nature, our Master is away. We do not see Him as the apostles did. Yet He is with us in His divine nature and in His Body and Blood which we will receive today. We are in that time between Jesus’ ascending to heaven and His coming again in glory. During

this time, in the time of life that we have on earth we not only avoid evil but do good, interacting with the people God has placed in our lives with love, using the material gifts He has given us with charity, and availing ourselves of the spiritual gifts we have in the Church frequently and with devotion. No one knows when Jesus will come in glory. No one knows when Jesus will call us from this life. As we go about our day to day lives we await His return, in one way or another, knowing that if we do not act with love towards others, if we do not use in a godly way the gifts He has given us, not only will these gifts be lost to us, but we also will be lost. But if we are mindful of from Whom all good things come that we have, we will use our gifts such that virtue in us will increase so that one day we may hear words spoken by God not to someone else but to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21)