The Festival of St. Nicholas, Bishop and Confessor
St. Matthew 25:14-23
December 6th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

> "And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, 'Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents.' His lord said unto him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.'"

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

> O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, my dear friends, we celebrate the Festival of St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop and Confessor. Myra is in Asia Minor, the region where the light of the Gospel was spread to many people by the Apostles, and where many of the churches listed in the New Testament are located. The festival day of St. Nicholas marks his death. He died on this day, December 6th, in 343 A.D. He is called "Bishop" because he was the bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. He is called "Confessor" because he was one of the orthodox theologians at the Council of Nicea in 325. According to legend, he slapped Arius, a heretic preacher who started what became known as "Arianism." The Arians denied the divinity of the Christ, our Lord + Jesus. When St. Nicholas heard the blasphemy coming from Arians mouth, he allegedly slapped him in the face.

Whether this truly happened or not, St. Nicholas is also known for other things. He is the historical individual of whom the modern Santa Claus is a representation. Santa Claus is dressed in red and visits children to bring them presents if they are good. This of course fits in with the "good works" based religion of our society. Good people are rewarded, bad people receive coal. People like to be praised for their good deeds. This is why we see during this time of the year more people doing so-called "good works." They up their giving and donating to causes they view as worthy of their funds. Some people even make a big show of it, so that they receive the appropriate pat on the back for being such good human beings. Santa Claus represents this philosophy in our society.

He is supposed to be a representation of St. Nicholas, but he is a poor substitute at best. St. Nicholas was known to be kind and generous. He was, according to legend, willing to give to those who were less fortunate. It is believed that he put up the money for the dowries of three young women, who without it would not have been able to marry, and who would have most likely have ended up in prostitution in order to make a living. So, his generosity is something that has been told through the centuries, as a testament to his good will. He appears to have lived what people refer to as "a good

Christian life." If we were to base our salvation upon our good works, if St. Nicholas was to base his salvation on the amount of his good works, then we would be able to say with the landowner in today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But, as is often the case, St. Nicholas is not just known for being a kind and generous individual. He should really be remembered for his faithfulness to the Word of God. The Edict of Milan, the document that granted the right for Christians to worship openly and freely, was signed in February of 313 A.D. St. Nicholas was born prior to this edict, and was according to history, imprisoned and tortured under the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Even under this torment, at a young age, he was faithful to the teachings of the Christian Church. He was released from prison when the Edict of Milan was signed. He would return to be the bishop of Myra where he would continue to preach faithfully the orthodox Christian faith that is confessed in the Nicene Creed.

His role as "Confessor" at the Council of Nicea, even if marked by the legend of slapping Arius, does show his faithfulness to the doctrine that the Apostles handed down to him, and has been handed down to us. He was one of the framers of the Creed we use in our Divine Services. He boldly confessed that the Christ was of the same substance of the Father. That the Christ was not a unique Creation of the Lord God but was in fact both true God and true man. He is "Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By Whom all things are made," as we confess in the Nicene Creed every time we gather for Divine Service. The same words that confess our faithfulness to the true teachings of the orthodox, Christian Church.

And this is something for which we can truly be praised. Mankind likes to praise each other for their good deeds, and there is certainly some merit to people doing good works. We are indeed to do good works; to obey the Ten Commandments and order our lives according to them. It is commendable when we do a good job, that we get a pat on the back every so often, just to remind us that our works are not going on unnoticed. But, unlike many in this world, getting a "job well done" sticker and a pat on the back is not why we do good works. We do not do them for our own glory, but for the benefit of our neighbors. If we happen to get recognition for that along the way, well and good. But this is not the main purpose for doing good works.

In fact, good works should not really be our focus, but being faithful to the Word of God and the teachings that have been handed down to us should be our focus. The good works we will do will flow out of our faithfulness, just as the kindness and generosity of St. Nicholas shined through because he faithfully believed the orthodox Christian faith which he had been taught. Our good works will also shine through in this dark world, because we have remained faithful to the teachings that have been handed down to us, and the Holy Ghost continues to work in us to help us desire to do what is beneficial to our neighbors first, and to ourselves second. For this reason, both St. Nicholas and we are worthy to hear the words of our Lord when we are called from this vale of tears to our home in Heaven, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

For that is what the servants with five and two talents did in the absence of their lord and master, they were faithful in what had been given them. They did not act like the wicked servant who took his one talent and went and hid it in the ground, so that nobody could tell that he had been given any talent in the first place. He was not faithful in a little, and so what little he had was taken away from him. The servants with two and five talents were faithful to the teachings that had been handed down to them. They confessed the Creed, they studied the Word of God, they prayed to the Lord God heavenly Father, in the Name of the Lord + Jesus, through the working of the Holy Ghost. And their faithfulness was rewarded with more faithfulness.

St. Nicholas did not have an easy life. He spent the early years of his life enduring persecution and torture. He could have easily forsaken the Church for temporal bodily pleasure—for the cessation

of torture. But he saw a greater glory that awaited him in Heaven. The trials of this life paled in comparison with the joys of Heaven. He treated his earthly goods in the same fashion. He viewed the monies he had been given as means only to benefit his fellowman. For his true treasures awaited him in the eternal kingdom of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ. On account of his faithfulness, we can confess with all certainly that the Lord + Jesus welcomed him into the realms of Heaven with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” Such also is our hope.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us also not hide our “talents” in the ground afraid to reveal to anyone that we are a Christian. Rather, let us remain faithful in the gifts that have been presented to us. Let us continue to confess the Christian faith, let us continue to read and study the Word of the Lord God, and let us continue to be generous and kind with the gifts that our Lord God has given to us, so that our fellowman may benefit, and we may welcome them into our midst when they come to faith in the Lord + Jesus. For we have as our example the blessed Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bishop and Confessor, who was not only kind and generous, but more importantly was faithful to the teachings of the Christian Church unto his death. May we also remain steadfast in the faith until we are called to our eternal home in Heaven. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!