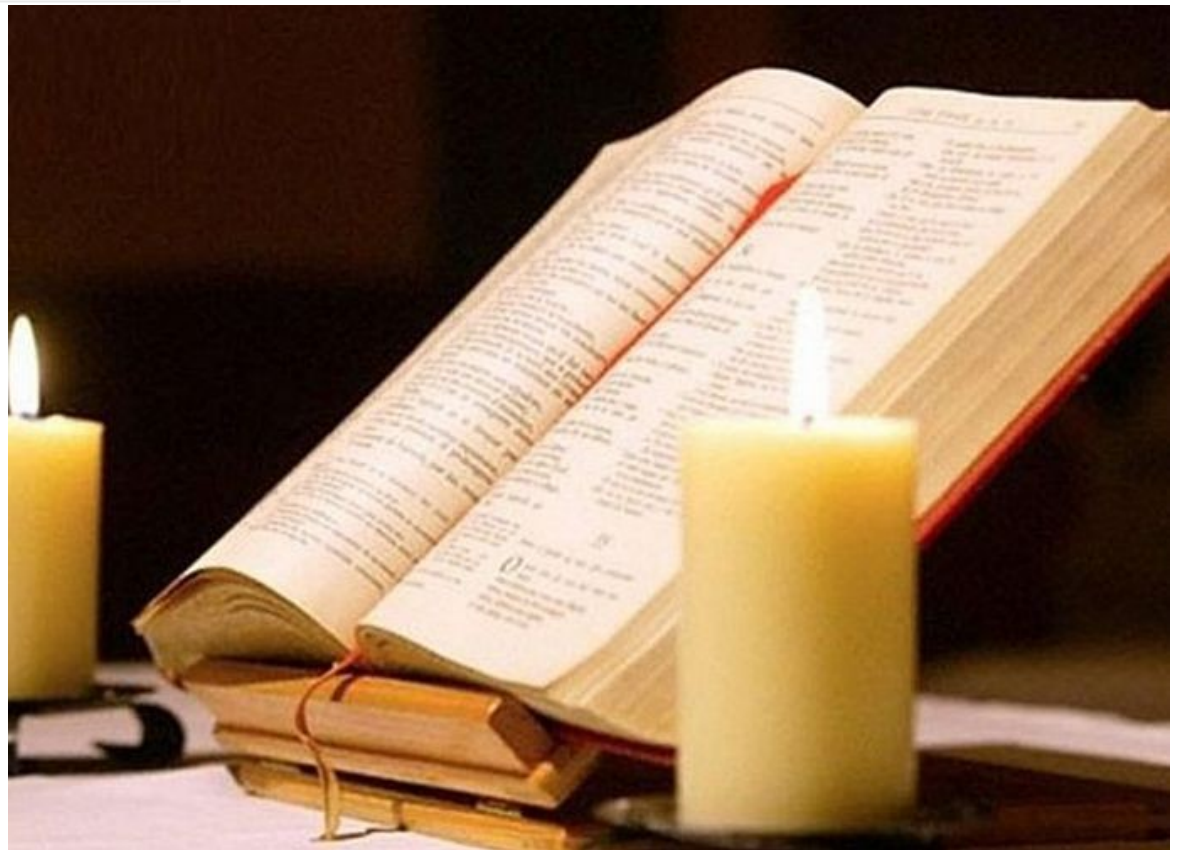


GOSPEL PEARLS

A fairy tale to keep children happy?

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Jesus said to his disciples: "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came

forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, '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.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, '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.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 25, 14-30)

Sloth, or spiritual laziness, is one of the seven deadly sins which, if not counteracted with the indispensable help of divine grace, leads souls to perdition. The slothful person tends not to share the gifts he received from God. Yet, unlike material objects, the talents God has given us are multiplied in exchange, while they are lost when we try to keep them only for ourselves. The slothful person, therefore, tends to commit sins of omission which are most insidious because we can easily underestimate their seriousness to the point of ignoring them. The slothful person does not want to risk loving. For this reason, the infernal punishment to which the slothful person condemns himself is not only made up of darkness (a sign of a meaningless life) and weeping (despair), but also of inner chill, as evidenced by the gnashing (chattering) of the useless servant's teeth. Do you have a real fear of ending up in hell, or do you consider it nothing more than a fairy tale to keep children happy?