

Date: December 3, 2022

Subject: 25th Sunday After Pentecost

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today, we celebrate one of the twelve major feasts of the church calendar, the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple. I congratulate all of you on this holiday. This Sunday is also the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost. I will use the Gospel reading for Sunday for this week's discussion.

**Luke 12: 16-21**

*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?*

*And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.*

*And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*

*But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

This Gospel makes us think about wealth. We see a certain man suddenly and unexpectedly becoming very rich. So great is his wealth that he reasons it will suffice for a luxurious life of leisure for many years. Many, if not all of us, probably had such thoughts about how wonderful it would be to suddenly possess great wealth. The man was ecstatic with great plans about how he was going to enjoy his life.

But God was not ecstatic. He called the man a fool. Why? Because he was only planning to lay up treasure *for himself*. He gave no thought to the fact that doing this will not make him *rich toward God*.

This last phrase, *rich toward God*, is something that we should think about deeply. We all know what laying up treasure for ourselves means. We are constantly concerned about this. We pursue this with all kinds of financial strategies, plans, and activities. But God condemned this man for exactly these kind of plans because no concern was taken to be *rich toward God*.

Well, what does this phrase mean? Are we *rich toward God*? Apparently we need to be if we don't want to hear God calling us fools. Implicit in God's word is an indication that it means that, being such fools, we will not be saved. How then does one become *rich toward God*?

Many people will probably think that they have no worries. They will say that they are rich toward God: "I go to church every Sunday and on holidays. I keep the fasts. Maybe not completely, but I do fast. I have icons in my house. I never steal. I have not killed anybody. I donate to charity. What else do I need?"

These are the kinds of actions that they claim make them *rich toward God*. Do they?

Perhaps they do. But there is a great possibility that they do not. Why do I say this? Because these actions are only salvific if we do them with the correct intent. What is our motivation in performing them? Are we motivated by our love for God? Or are we, through them, acting similarly to the way that the man in our story was acting, only *laying up treasure for ourselves*?

To understand this thought better, let us look at several examples of how seemingly pious acts are revealed to be something else entirely. Let us look first at donating to charity. If the **sole** reason that we donate is to help people in need, it is a holy act. It enriches us toward God, because as the Savior explained to us in His description of the Last Dread Judgment: *when you feed, clothe, comfort another person, you are actually doing that to Me.*

But if you donated in order to be praised for donating, no matter how large your donation is, it is not a holy act. As Christ instructs us in the Sermon on the Mount: *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

Often when a fast approaches, people will say, “This is great! I can finally lose twenty pounds!” Or, “I can take a rest from my normal activities.” Fasting in this manner is not holy or beneficial for salvation. This kind of fast is performed for personal gain, not out of love for God.

Having icons in one’s house is not a holy act if the icons just hang as pictures with no praying done before them.

“I never killed anyone.” But do you get angry at anyone or hang on to your anger? Christ teaches: *You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, Don’t commit murder, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment.*

Therefore, we must examine and analyze every action to determine if, in fact, they are pious and make us rich toward God. Did we do it out of love for God, or did we do it for our own gain? Only then can we determine if we are, indeed, rich toward God.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, any good act is holy only if we do it selflessly, out of love for God. Only then will it bring us spiritual benefit. Therefore, if we truly want to be saved, let us make an internal audit of our actions to see what kind of wealth we possess. And what better time than now, as we have just begun the Nativity Fast? This is a wonderful way to prepare to meet the new-born Savior at His birth into our world.

With Much Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kotar