

Date: September 11, 2021

Subject: 12th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

What happened on 9/11 is a prime example of how the devil is able to delude people into doing demonic work, thinking that their actions are for the glory of God. How careful we need to be not to fall into such a trap!

MATTHEW 19: 16-26

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

A young man came to Jesus and asked Him: *what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?* The Savior's first answer, to keep the commandments, did not satisfy him. He asked which commandments was the Savior talking about. He asked this because the Jewish people were expected by their authorities, the Pharisees, to obey not only commandments that God gave to Moses, but additionally, commandments that were known as the Tradition of the Elders.

The Savior rejected this tradition because it contained a perversion of God's Law. It was constructed as a way to further increase the wealth, power, and influence of the Pharisees. Therefore, He responded by listing the true commandments found in the Ten Commandments.

The young man still was not satisfied. He claimed: *All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?* His question suggested that he had a very surface understanding of commandments. He followed them with his mind, but they did not penetrate into his heart. Because of this, he felt a spiritual emptiness that results from efforts to fulfill commandments without their affecting the heart and the inner life of the person.

The Savior responded with a very profound spiritual option. *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* From the

Savior's two answers, we are given two ways that it is possible to receive eternal life. Let us look at each one in more detail.

If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

In the Savior's last meal with the Apostles during the Mystical Supper, He made a similar statement to the apostles: *If ye love me, keep my commandments*. This was what the Savior first told the young man to do, as eternal life can be achieved in this way. But what we already know is that it is very hard to keep all the commandments. Some might even suggest that it is impossible. Our Savior, of course, knows what our capabilities are. Therefore, He encourages us to persevere and not lose faith. *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible*.

We are sinful creatures. We will only stop sinning after our soul leaves our body. But if we sincerely strive to live spiritually according to God's commandment, we can be saved through the commandments. God doesn't even demand perfection. When we fall short, through sincere repentance our transgressions are washed away. Then, God adds His mercy, enabling us to be saved.

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect,

While spiritually keeping the commandments will allow a person to be saved, this path is not totally satisfying to some people. They seek something deeper. Hearing the Savior's words, they strive to achieve perfection. This is the perfection that true monastics seek by abandoning the world. This is what the Savior offered the young man. Unfortunately, this path was not one that the young man was willing to embark on. He was too attached to his wealth.

My dear brothers and sister in Christ, if we truly want to be saved, the question that the young man asked the Savior, *what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life*, is a question we should be asking the Savior continually. And we then need to do the good things our Savior asks us to do. While achieving spiritual perfection might not be what we are capable of, *doing good things* is and it is essential. We cannot be saved by simply not doing anything bad. We cannot be saved without spiritually struggling and overcoming the temptations that we meet in our life. And we also cannot become so attached to earthly things that we cannot sacrifice and deny them for the sake of our salvation. Therefore, let us continually measure what is most important to us, and if we have strayed from the path that the Savior first walked for us, let us quickly return to it. Salvation is only possible in this way.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar