

“DON’T LAY UP FOR YOURSELF TREASURES ON THE EARTH”

By Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev (December 5, 2004)

Today we heard the parable of our Lord Jesus Christ about a man who had spent his entire life accumulating wealth (Luke 12:16-21). Consequently, his granaries became entirely filled so that he could live the rest of his life comfortably, well-to-do and carefree. He said to his soul: *“Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.”* But that night the Lord appeared to him and said: *“Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So - concludes the Lord - is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

This parable is a lesson for each of us. Many people spend their entire life accumulating wealth. All of their thoughts and all of their feelings are dedicated to this. As a result, some turn to crime, others are prepared to sacrifice their happiness and their time, and a third group are prepared to step on people in order to eliminate any obstacles that separate them from wealth. Isn't the thirst for profit really the root of many criminal acts which are committed in our days? Don't we see really that for the sake of money, people are even capable of committing murder? What can stop a person from this? Only one thing — the fear of death. If that rich man, of whom the parable speaks, remembered that the hour of death awaited him, it is possible that he might have behaved differently. Perhaps he would have lived not only for himself but *“made himself rich toward God,”* as the Lord says.

Often people are so concerned with earthly affairs and acquiring money, that they forget about the perspective of eternal life. However, the Lord teaches us that the treasure which rusts and decomposes remains here on the earth. We don't take it with us into the next world. Everything that we have accumulated for ourselves here will be lost, but everything that we offer to God or to other people remains with us. At the same time, the Lord doesn't teach us that we should live a life as lazy inactive idlers, so that under the pretext of not having to make money, we do nothing at all. The Lord expects something else from us, that we would think not only about ourselves but about other people as well, not only about our temporary life, but about eternal life.

No one is saying that we don't need money for ourselves and for our neighbors. Woe to those parents who take care of themselves but forget about their children. Woe to those sons and daughters who take care of themselves and neglect taking care of their parents. The Lord doesn't demand that we should have nothing at all, but He desires that we would not be egoists, that if we have wealth, we would share it with our neighbors. Above all, however, our first priority should be the thought of eternal life, about our high Christian destiny. For the Lord did not create us so that we would spend our time here which has been allotted to us in the pursuit of wealth, whether we live for a 100 years, 70 years, 30 years or even less. The time that we lose trying to accumulate wealth for ourselves is time that we lose for eternity. The time spent not thinking about eternity and getting closer to God estranges us from God.

When our time comes and death overtakes us — and that time will come for everyone — for some sooner, for some later, we will pass naked into eternity. All earthly possessions will remain here. Along with our soul, only that which we have accumulated in our hearts will pass over with us. Therefore, let us think about our Christian calling, about the treasury of good deeds which we must accumulate in our soul, that is to say, to be proactive and responsive in our relationship with other people. We must help people. If we have something that we can share with others, then we must do that. If we don't have material wealth, then let us share our spiritual wealth. And if we don't have spiritual wealth, then let us share whatever it is that we do have. For everyone has at least something that he can share with his neighbors. And everything that he shares with his neighbors will never be lost but will last forever.

Let us remember again and again why we are alive and what is the purpose of life. For many think that the purpose of life is to be [materially] successful, like the rich man in the parable, to say to our soul: *“Rest, eat, drink and be merry.”* However, for some reason, it

happens that when someone seemingly has accumulated everything that is necessary for happiness, somehow there is no rest, or eating, or drinking, or merriment, but depression and melancholy instead. And he doesn't remember why he accumulated all of this and for why he is living. Amongst the wealthy and those who are overly secure in a material way there is widespread depression, despair and melancholy. People who seem to have everything, who are swimming in luxury, are forced to go to psychotherapists and psychics, in the hope that they will be able to help free them from this condition. Why does this happen? Because the souls of these people are devoid of any internal content. They are like an empty shell. Therefore, no matter how much they have acquired, it will always be depressing and difficult for them, because one's heart can only be filled by God.

Genuine happiness and blessedness can only be achieved by the person who lives in God. And for us, people who believe in God, we know that if we are with God, and God is with us, if He is in our heart and in our soul, then no kind of misfortune, sorrow or hardship will be terrible for us. We don't fear poverty, because we know that God will more than cover any deprivation, lack or material scarcity with His grace. People who do not have this spiritual experience of life lack the ability to feel the Divine presence. No matter how much they have amassed, they will not be happy.

Therefore, it is our goal to accumulate spiritual riches within our hearts and share them with our neighbors. It is because of this that the Lord brings us into His Church. It is because of this that he has made us his little flock, a chosen people, so that we would live with Him and share this grace with those who surround us. Let us use the time of the Nativity Fast in order to prepare for the feast of the Nativity of Christ so that we will not approach the Lord with empty hands. Like the wise men who brought to the Lord gold, incense and myrrh, let us bring to Him the treasures of the good deeds of our lives, let us bring Him our hearts and let us bring Him our love.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen