

WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE? Matthew 6:22-33

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St. Basil's Russian Orthodox Church, Watervliet, NY 12189, June 25, 2023

It falls to the lot of us who are living in the world (as opposed to those who have chosen the monastic way of life) to pass our lives amidst severe and incessant occupation. Many of us feel perpetually sacrificed to the business world, with some time left over for family and some little time for relaxation and amusement. When, then, is the question to be asked, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?', what time for God? Aren't the various cares and concerns we fret over totally incompatible with habits of devotion, such as attendance at church and prayer? Is not the taste for devotion lessened? Is not the time for God abridged? We heard in the Gospel today that you cannot serve God and Mammon. Mammon is another word for riches, and particularly when wealth has become an object of covetousness and devotion. Are we not more and more conquered against warnings and against our will; not, perhaps, without pain and compunction, by the Mammon of life? And what is the cure for this great evil to which we are exposed?

The cure is to keep a sacred place in our hearts where Almighty God is enshrined, and where none of the human cares or Mammon of this world can enter. Let us set an impenetrable boundary and wall which will not allow Mammon to penetrate our spirit, and remember that whatever our role or profession in this life, we never forget that above all we are Christians. Let us wish for no more wealth than what is necessary or appropriate for one who seeks above all to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us covet no more honor or earthly glory or ambition than is suitable for a child of God. Let us boldly and bravely set limits for ourselves, and show to others that we have limits, and that no professional or activity in society shall ever induce us to infringe upon the rules and practices of our faith. In the midst of our highest success, in the most perfect gratification of human vanity, in the most ample increase of our wealth, fall down at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, and say, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'

In the quietness of the Holy Spirit, God will whisper to us that "It is better to give than to receive." Giving leads to the fruits of the Spirit: goodness, kindness, patience, love and cheerfulness. When we give to others, in return God gives us salvation. The Lord will further whisper to us, "Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful." Mercy and alms giving are the same thing. The roots of the word "alms" can be found in ancient Latin and Greek words meaning mercy and pity. In other words, another way of saying "alms giving" is "mercy giving." During our church services we are constantly asking the Lord for mercy: "Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy," over and over again. Before we can ask the Lord to show mercy to us, shouldn't we first practice mercy towards others? Shouldn't we first practice alms giving, or "mercy giving." Giving and showing mercy affects our souls and our spiritual growth. Giving penetrates into the deep recesses of our hearts. When we give, we become more God-like, because God is the ultimate Giver.

In Matthew 25:31-46 the Lord reveals to us how we will be judged on that final day. We will be asked if we fed the hungry, if we clothed the naked, if we visited the sick and those in prison, and if we gave shelter to the homeless. Does this mean that we do not need to pray, to fast, to go to Confession, or to go to church? Of course not. These activities are *tools* which, if practiced in the proper spirit and with sincerity, can help us to become purified and bring us closer to God. When our hearts are cleansed of sin, when goodness, kindness, and love fills our being, then we are inclined to naturally imitate our Savior and generously share our time, treasures, and talents with our neighbor and with the Church. We will then naturally be inclined to be generous and to show *mercy*. The Lord said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second greatest commandment is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On this depend all

the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37-40). Love for God and love for neighbor is expressed by *giving*. This is the answer to the question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”



The widow gives all that she has, her two mites, to the temple (Luke 21:1-4).