

SERMON - Parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus - October 20, 2019, Luke 16:19-31

Listen to these words from Holy Scripture:

- “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” ~ John 13:34-35
- “love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor” ~ Romans 12:10
- “through love be servants of one another” ~ Galatians 5:13
- “always seek to do good to one another and to all” ~ 1 Thessalonians 5:15
- “love one another earnestly from the heart” ~ 1 Peter 1:22
- “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another” ~ 1 Peter 4:9

For the sake of brevity, this is only a sample of quotes from Holy Scripture concerning how the Lord expects us to treat one another, and not only family and relatives, but the stranger and even our enemies as well, those who hate us as well as those who love us. The Lord said, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?...love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return...Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:32-36). The Lord also said that we should give to everyone who begs from us (Luke 6:30). Obviously the rich man in today’s parable is not living the way he should. St. Theophan the Recluse says that the bottom line is that we must live and understand things only according to the Lord’s revelation. St. Theophan further points out that one day we will all suddenly wake up to reality, such as the rich man in today’s parable, but then it will be too late to correct ourselves. Some people believe that in the end everyone will be saved. This is a heresy that was taught long ago by the famous Christian theologian Origen. This heresy has a name. It is called “apokatastasis”. No doubt this belief in the ultimate reconciliation of all sinners with God is motivated by compassion and the fact that God loves us. However, in Mark 9:43 our Savior states that the fires of Hell never go out. The Lord repeats in Matthew 25:46 that those, like the rich man in today’s parable, will suffer eternal punishment. This is self-inflicted punishment, because the rich man chose not to live by God’s revelation but instead lived a life of selfish greed and overindulgence. The rich man was totally blind and indifferent to the sufferings of the poor, the naked, the sick and the hungry. In Matthew 25 our Savior reveals what will be said by God on Judgment Day to men such as the rich man in today’s parable: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me... Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” So how about it? Is God really the creator of Hell and evil? Is God really a torturer of His creation? Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, in his treatise called “The River of Fire,” states that the Devil wants us to believe that God does not really love us but only loves himself. He accepts us only if we behave the way He wants us to behave and hates us if we do not behave the way He ordered us to behave. He is so offended by our insubordination that we must pay for it by eternal tortures created by Him. Is it any wonder that so many people today not only disbelieve in God but hate God? Who can believe in and love a torturer who wants to torment us for eternity? That is why in Greek the Devil was given the name “δυναβολος” which means “slanderer.” So what is the correct understanding of the afterlife, eternity and the torments and sufferings described as

Hell? Dr. Alexander Kalomiros states that God is Truth and Light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light... Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God and what is in our hearts will be revealed. What will distinguish one person from another will not be a decision of God, a reward or a punishment from Him, but what is in our hearts and how our hearts feel about truth and light. Our eternal lot is determined by the love or hate that we have in our hearts. A healthy heart will experience bliss and joy and welcome the light of God and truth. An evil heart will cringe in pain, will be blinded by the light of truth, will suffer and hurt and want to hide from this light. We may be able to escape from this light for a time in this life, but in the next life there will be no place to run or hide. To quote Dr. Kalomiros: "Love will enrobe everything with its sacred Fire which will flow like a river from the throne of God and will irrigate paradise. But this same river of Love—for those who have hate in their hearts—will suffocate and burn. The difference is in man, not in God. The difference is conditioned by the free choice of man, which God respects absolutely. God's judgment is the revelation of the reality which is in man.

Brothers and Sisters, while there is still time, open your eyes and let in the light of God's love and truth. Live according to His commandments, be loving and kind, and not selfish and greedy. Care for your brother and sister and love them and help them. Be chaste and pure. Walk the Royal Path, and do not overindulge your flesh so that your spirit may live. The more we have, the more responsibility we have as well. The rich man, high and mighty and possessing all earthly things, doesn't even have a name in the next life. A homeless man, destitute, poor, full of sores, suffering and ignored by the rich man, not only has a name - Lazarus-and his name is inscribed in the book of life. Let us make certain, warns St. Theophan, that when that final day comes, our names will also be known and inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.