

SERMON - THE RICH MAN AND POOR LAZARUS, Luke16:19-31, October 21, 2018

How many of us consider ourselves wealthy in material things? We may have many things, but would we call ourselves wealthy? Probably not. Do we ever wish that we had more, that we could enter into that category called “wealthy”? Many people dream about becoming materially wealthy. Ironically, if you compare our average lifestyle, wealth and possessions to other parts of the world, many of those other people dream about becoming wealthy too, and their dream is to have what we already have, and to live the lifestyle that we already live, and to be at the economic level that we have already achieved. It is strange how poverty for one man can be considered wealthy to another. Be that as it may, if you live in a clean shelter, have clean clothes, eat from an abundant dinner table, even have your own automobile, then you are doing much better than the average man or woman on this earth. The saintly Serbian Patriarch Pavle of blessed memory used to always take public transportation or walk. He said that he would not ride in an automobile until every Serb had his or her own automobile. St. John Chrysostom also believed in economic equality and believed that there should be neither wealthy nor poor, that no one should have too much and no one should have too little. Can you imagine the Patriarch riding the city bus with the average people? This was his lifestyle, even though he was the Patriarch. St. John Chrysostom said that the love of wealth is an unnatural passion. The desire for wealth is neither natural nor necessary. Wealth is harmful because it makes you the captive of soulless possessions and distracts you from the service of God. A life of luxury, ease and possessions is very harmful for the soul. We may not think of ourselves as wealthy, but we have more than enough of luxury, ease and possessions to distract us and keep us from praying and going to church. We have enough wealth and luxury so that we can become attached to earthly possessions and pleasures and feel that we have no time or need for God. That is one reason that our Lord says that the way to perdition is wide but the way to God and salvation is narrow and difficult. If we want to go up and ascend a great height, it takes much toil and sweat to reach the mountaintop. If we are on a roof or a cliff, it takes no work or effort at all to throw ourselves off and come to a crashing destructive end. Christianity cannot be practiced mechanically and easily. Christianity must be practiced with toil and sweat. Our lord says in the Gospel, “What good is it if a man gain the whole world and lose his soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?” The point is that we should be aware that we will live only one life and we should use this life in the best way that we can. As Christians we are entrusted by the Lord to keep the commandments and to do good works. We should use the freedom that God has given us to struggle to keep the commandments and to do good to our neighbor. The rich man in today’s Gospel was possessed by his possessions. He didn’t own them, they owned him. He was so blind in his selfishness, greed and lifestyle of earthly pleasures that he could not see Christ in poor Lazarus who lay starving, ill and naked at his doorstep. The Christian is called upon to have a warm and tender heart and to have love. Greedy attachment to earthly possessions and pleasures is a dead end that leads to hard-heartedness and the absence of love. It is very peculiar how we often think that we can actually even own anything. There is no such thing as “personal property” because everything belongs to God and to Him only. All things are given by Him as a gift in the form of a loan. Everything is God’s, and all that man can claim as truly his own are his good works. It is only our good works that we can take with us into the next life. That is why the rich man, who seemed to have so much goes into the next life with nothing, because he had no good works. He now stands naked before God with nothing to show for his life. How often do we live our lives as if this fantasy will go on forever and then, in the blink of an eye, all will come crashing down and we will find ourselves alone and naked and standing before the throne of God and we will have to give an account of what we did with our lives. That is what happened to the rich man and to poor Lazarus. When Lazarus died, the Lord says that the angels from heaven came and carried Lazarus’ soul right into the bosom of Abraham. Concerning the rich man, the Lord says that he died, was buried and went to Hades. The rich man, for all his wealth and earthly greatness, does not even have a name. The name of

Lazarus is recorded in the Book of Life and eternally remembered in the Kingdom of Heaven. The name of the selfish rich man is forgotten for eternity. He had his few moments of glory and pleasure on this earth, now no one cares any more about him or who he even was, and no one remembers even his name. There is an insurmountable chasm between Lazarus in Heaven and the rich man in Hell. The chasm was not created by God, it was created by the Devil and by mankind in cooperation. It has been created by pride, apostasy and sin. It is a chasm of passions, unbelief, harshness, and lack of mercy which has separated the people of God from those who are in eternal torment. As a final thought, let us remember St. John Chrysostom's comment on our Savior's words about the Last Judgment: "There is no other virtue that He (the Lord) mentioned except performance of works of charity, for charity comes from love, and love is the goal and meaning of Christianity." Amen.