

SERMON on Matthew 6:22-33, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," July 7, 2019

Some years ago, when I was a young husband and father, and retirement from my secular employment was still a long way off, I wrote down on a piece of paper five or ten things, I don't remember how many, that I wished for in the future. Whatever they were, I don't remember now, they were important to me at the time. I sealed the piece of paper in an envelope and decided that I would wait five years and then open the envelope. I put the envelope away somewhere and forgot about it. One day I happen to come across this envelope, and the five year period had already passed. I opened the envelope. What I experienced was astonishing and amazing. Everything that I had written down and hoped for the future had come true. I was amazed at how good God was to me and that He had blessed me with mercy and kindness and given me everything that I asked for. I currently took these blessings for granted and had forgotten that at one time I lived without them. I was granted my hopes and desires, yet life for me was still full of anxiety, struggles and temptations. If I were to create a new list for the future, I would have ten completely different so-called needs and desires. I wondered, "Is a person ever fulfilled? Are we ever satisfied? Is there ever an end to our needs, wants and cravings? Is it possible to ever reach a point when we can honestly say, 'Enough. I need and want no more. I am happy. I am satisfied.'" Man has no peace. He is restless, searching, looking for some kind of oracle that will answer his questions, some kind of gnostic secret wisdom that will give peace to his soul. Jesus tells us today what we need to do in order to achieve true peace and satisfaction, in order to truly feel that we have enough. The Lord tells us during His Sermon on the Mount that we should seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness. What does this mean? Archbishop Andrei (Rimarenko) of blessed memory tells us that this means to "Confess Christ before people, love Him more than everyone and everything else, and take up our cross and follow Him." Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov says that "Christ is not calling us to reject our life, but to sanctify it: to bring every aspect of our life to the service of the kingdom, to remember that the goal of Christian life is theosis—a union with Christ and ascension of our nature to the right side of the Father, not shop-osis—a union with groceries and ascension to the nearest shopping mall." Theosis, union with Christ, takes struggle and action on our part. What kind of struggle? The Lord answers that question today as well when He says that the eye of our body must be clean. The Russian text reads "clean" or "pure," as opposed to the English translation which reads "sound." The eye is our conscience. Therefore, our mind, our conscience, our hearts and our bodies must be clean and pure. This can only happen by struggling in our daily lives to keep the commandments of God. How do we do this? We keep a prayer rule, we fast, we read the Holy Scriptures daily, we confess our sins in the Mystery of Holy Confession, we receive the Most pure and Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Savior. There is no oracle or secret gnostic knowledge that will do all this for us. Only blood, sweat and tears, humility, obedience, and sincere repentance of our sins will bring fulfillment, peace and satisfaction to our souls. Certainly we should be educated, learn a profession or a trade, work honestly to pay for our needs: shelter, food, clothing, etc. The Lord is not asking us to eat garbage like Steve Allen did, as I mentioned in last week's sermon. However, remember the important lesson given to us today by our Savior, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Never let ambition for money or possessions overtake our love for God. Beware, brothers and sisters, for food, gold, silver, houses, automobiles, jewelry, what have you, these things can all become idols and they can replace Jesus and become our new god. Remember the Hebrews and the golden calf. You can own the biggest mansion in the world, but you can only occupy one room at a time. You can own thousands of acres of fields, but you can only stand in an area of a few square feet at a time. You can own hundreds of pairs of shoes but you can only wear one pair at a time. You may even be dead before you can wear each pair at least once in your lifetime. Speaking of possessions, does anyone ever really own anything? Aren't we just temporary stewards of God's earth and creation? Sure, we can show a deed with our name on it and say a house belongs to us. When we are six feet under the ground and our bodies are consumed by worms, will it make any difference that our name is still on a piece of paper that says a house

belongs to us? Anxiety is the disease of our time. The Lord tells us not to be anxious, and there is only one way to do this, and the way is straight and narrow. The Lord tells us that we cannot serve God and mammon. Let us choose God. It takes effort, self-sacrifice, it means denying ourselves and it means voluntarily taking up our cross and following Him. Amen.