

Sermon on the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, Matt. 6:22-33, "The eye is the lamp of the body..." , June 17, 2018

Two years ago I visited the famous Vanderbilt Mansion in Hyde Park. Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) rose from poverty to become a shipping and railroad tycoon. He was called "Commodore." He amassed a multi-million dollar fortune when the average annual income in the US was around \$380, well below the poverty line. Vanderbilt left his fortune to his eight children who lived lives of excess, extravagance and self-indulgence. They built 40 opulent mansions and country estates, and entertained lavishly, largely depleting the family money. In 1895 Vanderbilt's grandson Frederick and his wife Louise bought Hyde Park and built the mansion that is now a museum today. At the turn of the century they spent \$2,250,000 on this one mansion. With inflation, today that amount of money would be equivalent to \$63,759,600. So, looking through today's eyes, it would be the same as if someone today spent almost 64 million dollars to build only one house to be used only as a spring and country estate. The family owned about 40 such properties throughout the world. With the advent of the income tax in 1913, WWI in 1914, and the Great Depression in the 1930s, it became impossible for the last Vanderbilt family owner of this property, Margaret Luise Van Alen, to keep and maintain it. She tried to sell it for \$350,000, a fraction of what it originally cost to build it, and no one would buy it. She couldn't even give it away. In the end, following the advice and example of her neighbor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, she donated the property to the National Parks Service.

The Commodore's son who inherited the majority of the initial fortune often complained about the burden of his wealth. He would often say that massive wealth provided no advantages over moderate wealth. He said...

"I have my house, my pictures and my horses, and so do they. I can have steam yacht if I want to, but it would give me no pleasure, and I don't care for it." When speaking of a neighbor, he said, "He isn't worth a hundredth part as much as I am, but he has more of the real pleasures of life than I have. His house is as comfortable as mine, even if it didn't cost so much; his team is about as good as mine; his opera box is next to mine; his health is better than mine, and he will probably outlive me. And he can trust his friends. Being the richest person in the world brought him, he said, nothing but anxiety."

When William Vanderbilt uttered these words, he was the richest man in the world. He was very unhappy despite having everything money could buy. He was in poor health and worried immensely about his money. He was initially going to copy his father's estate plan by leaving the majority of his fortune to his older son, but he didn't want to burden him with the stress and pressure. So he ended up dividing the majority of the wealth between his two sons.

The Commodore once said, "Any fool can make a fortune. It takes a man of brains to hold on to it after it's made."

Our Lord teaches us today in the Holy Gospel that our lives should be devoted to growing spiritually and living according to the commandments of God. "Lay not up treasures for yourself on earth, where moth and rust do consume..." our treasure should be a clean conscience and a pure heart. "You cannot serve God and mammon," our Savior says today. "Mammon" is money and material wealth. Living a hedonistic, materialistic, prideful, selfish and overindulgent life leads only to anxiety, depression, unhappiness, poor health, and ultimately spiritual and physical death. A spiritually corrupt man is like a sick man who is told by his physician to lie down on a silver bed and live in a chamber of gold. Of what use will those things be to him who is sick and dying? Having a spiritually sick and corrupt mind is like being on a beautifully equipped ship and the pilot is sunk beneath the waves. If the mind and soul are corrupt, of what good are wealth and earthly possessions? "Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and everything else will be added to you." What material wealth or carnal pleasures did St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, St. Anthony the Great, St. Isaac the Syrian, the

blessed elders Joseph, Porphyrios and Paisios, St. Nektarios and all the holy Mothers and Fathers of the Church possess? None. They grew spiritually rich by deliberately depriving themselves of material and carnal possessions and pleasures for the sake of the kingdom of God. In doing so they achieved peace and tranquility in their hearts and were consumed by love, kindness and joy in the Lord. Having no material possessions, they were wealthier than the richest man or woman alive. Let us imitate the Holy Ones and seek the treasure that does not rust but that shines brightly eternally in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.