

SERMON on the Rich Ruler, Luke 18:18-27, December 2, 2018

The first question that arises when we read today's Gospel is why the Lord questions the fact that the rich ruler addresses the the Lord as "good teacher." The Jews taught that only God should be called good, for all men are sinners and all men fall short of the glory of God. The first glaring problem with this man is that he does not see and understand that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God. If he believed in the Divinity of Jesus, then by all means he could call Jesus good. However, by calling Jesus merely a teacher, the man does not understand who Jesus really is. Jesus brings to the surface this conflict in the man's soul, because the man is divided. This man has one eye on heaven and one eye on the earth. Jesus proceeds to tell the man, "You know the commandments," but notice that Jesus only quotes to the man the commandments which pertain to men and how we should treat each other. Jesus does not quote the commandments concerning God. We have already established that the rich ruler had a conflict within himself about God and the nature of God. The Holy Fathers point out that the rich ruler, wittingly or unwittingly, is a liar when he says that from his youth he has kept all the commandments. If the rich ruler had truly kept all the commandments, then he would be spiritually exercised in the commandments. In other words, he would be very advanced in the spiritual life. Therefore, when the Lord tells the man to sell all that he has and come and follow Me, the man is immediately crushed and his flame goes out in a whimper. If this man had truly kept all the commandments from his youth as he claimed, he would have struggled with the challenge that the Lord gives him. The rich ruler would have at least attempted some sort of a fight, because he should already be attuned to respond with zeal to meet and struggle with spiritual challenges. The fact that he gives up so quickly and easily demonstrates his delusion, that he obviously has not even come close to keeping all the commandments from his youth. Either he is deluded or he is a simple liar, or perhaps a combination of both. Brothers and sisters, you and I are challenged to keep the commandments of God so that we would be free from the things below in order to follow after our Savior when He would call us. If we are attached to money and possessions like this man, if we have a multitude of excuses, then we are not exercised in the commandments, and we give up the challenges given to us by the Lord and fizzle out in a whimper just like the rich ruler. Let's not fool ourselves. How many of us believe like this rich ruler and even speak like this rich ruler when we are called upon to repent. How many of us say, "I have not killed anyone, I have not committed adultery, I have kept the commandments." Perhaps externally and superficially we have kept these commandments. However, how many times have we killed someone by gossiping about them, or hating them, or judging them, or saying an unkind word to someone and killing that person in their heart? Jesus requires that our hearts be pure and filled with love and kindness. There must be internal substance to our actions. Remember the Pharisee and the Publican? The Pharisee was similar to this rich ruler, he also claimed to have kept all the commandments, but he also was a liar. The Pharisee's heart was far away from God, full of pride and egotism, lacking in love. Whatever the Pharisee may have claimed to have kept externally, the reality for him, just like this rich ruler, is that his heart was far away from God, and as the Holy Fathers say, whether wittingly or not, he also was a liar. Another question arises, and that is, if this rich ruler kept all the commandments from his youth, why had he stashed away so much and acquired so many possessions and so much money and not given more to the poor? St. Serapion gave everything away, even the clothes on his back. He was naked and without anything for the sake of following the Gospel. When he was asked, "Father, who stole your clothes?", he would point to his little Gospel and say, "It is He in the Gospel who says give everything, so I gave everything for the Lord's sake, even my clothes." In the end St. Serapion even sold his little Gospel in order to fulfill the commandment of love. How many times did St. John of Kronstadt return home without shoes? There are so many saints and examples like these. "Who then can be saved?" the bystanders wonder when the Lord requires that the rich ruler give up everything. even if we are not rich, we all suffer from the passion of acquisitiveness and are overly attached to earthly things. With men these things are not

possible, but with God all things are possible. God builds the fire in our hearts and fans the flame, and we keep extinguishing the flame with our sins and covetousness. With men it is impossible, but with our Savior, through Holy Baptism, through Confession, through receiving the Divine and Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Savior, all things are possible. We have seen in the lives of so many saints where the flame of God in their hearts became a huge bonfire and they became as angels in human bodies—St. John of Shanghai, St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, Blessed Matrona of Moscow, St. Herman of Alaska, the holy Elders Joseph, Porphyrios and Paisios, men and women of our own times. Many people are alive today who are eyewitnesses of these holy ones, and who can attest that truly, with God, all things are possible. Amen.