

Sermon on the Rich Young Man
Matthew 19:16-26
Sunday, August 30, 2020

When we read today's gospel, we often focus on the fact that the young man did not give up all of his riches and follow Christ. In particular, we tend to focus on our Savior's words that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." We usually forget about the first part of this story. The young man asks our Savior what must he do to inherit eternal life. Our Savior instructs the fellow that he should keep the commandments and lists them by name. The young man answers that he has kept all these commandments from his youth. Let's for a moment examine ourselves. With a clear conscience, are we able to say the same as the young man, that from our youth we have kept all of these commandments? Do we completely follow and keep all of the Ten Commandments which are the foundation of the moral life? Can we honestly put ourselves on the same level as this young man? The young man persists in his questioning and asks if there is anything else he can do. Our Savior says yes, there is an additional path that he can take. If you would be perfect, you can give away all your riches, sell all your property and come and follow Me. Today we would understand the second choice that our Savior offers the young man to be to choose the monastic life. There are two choices. The first choice is to live in what we call the "world," have our secular employment, be married and have a family and follow the commandments of God, or give up everything: family, money and property and enter a monastery. There are no other viable choices. It is either the one or the other. There is a third choice, but it is not unto salvation but unto condemnation, and that is to follow the path of evil and to serve the devil. Not everyone is required to become a monastic. This is a beautiful and wonderful way of life but it is not for everyone. However, *everyone* is required to keep the commandments of God as well as to be morally precise in living the gospel. It makes no difference whether we are married or living in a monastery. The commandments of God are the same for everyone. The monastic life is simply stricter and at a higher level. More is given up for the sake of Christ. For those of us living in the world who do not completely physically give up all of our money, property and families, nonetheless, Christ must hold the first place in our hearts. Our Savior tells us that we must not be more attached to anything else in this life more than to Christ. "He who loves father or mother **more than me** is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). In a sense, then, monastics and those living in the world are called upon to do the same thing but in a different way. Our Savior says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). In another place the Lord says, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Mammon is money and the greedy pursuit of gain. In life we are all called upon from time to time to deny ourselves for the sake of the other. How often does the husband or wife deny their own desires in order to fulfill the desires of one's spouse? How often do parents deny their own wants for the sake of their children? How often do we make unselfish personal sacrifices in order to serve and to help others: family, friends, acquaintances, our neighbors, those in need, those who ask for help, everyone around us? You do not necessarily have to be a monk or nun in order to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ. This commandment is given unto all of us and is the calling to everyone who would be a Christian. Whether in the monastery or not in the monastery, we all have the opportunities to share what we have with others, whether it be money, possessions, our love, our care and our concern, our prayers for others and not only for ourselves. All of us must be doing and sharing and serving others with the blessings and talents that God has given us, no matter what form these talents may take. It is a sin to bury your talent in the ground and do nothing with it. God calls upon Christians to be people of action and to live the gospel, not only in word but in deed. This is the path that the Lord blesses us to follow, by which, with God's help, we may attain salvation and eternal life. Amen.