

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

**“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”
Matthew 19:16-26**

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St. Sava (1175-1236) is the most revered saint of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He was of the Royal family, but his thirst for the Christian life and for salvation overcame any desires for earthly power or prestige. As a young man he fled in secret to the Holy Mountain Athos where he was nurtured in the monastic life. When his father, the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja went to Athos to forcibly bring his son home, St. Sava told him, “You have accomplished all that a Christian sovereign should do; come now and join me in the true Christian life” His father took his advice, and St. Sava's parents left their royal duties to their middle son Stefan and both entered the monastic life. They gave much of their wealth to help the monasteries, exchanging their earthly riches for heavenly treasure.

St. Philaret the Merciful lived during the 8th century in Asia Minor. In his Life it is recorded that “he was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about “these least ones” (Mt. 25:40); the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means “lover of virtue,” was famed for his love for the poor and his extreme generosity. His very title “merciful” is very appropriate, because the Greek word for almsgiving, *ελεημοσύνη*, literally means “mercy-giving.”

A young rich man approaches the Lord in today's gospel, asking what good deed he must do to inherit eternal life. The Lord sees into the heart of this man. The Lord understands that he is too attached to his earthly wealth and possessions. The young man keeps the moral laws of the Ten Commandments, but his love for God and his love for his fellow man is impeded by his attachment to money. That is not to say that he does not give alms or pay his tithe to the Temple. However, this man is rich, and the more that we have, the more is expected of us. Giving must be generous and with a cheerful heart, and not a bare minimum just to keep the letter of the law. Thus, this man's conscience is disturbed, and that is why he comes to Jesus. He knows that something is wrong, but he does not know what it is. St. Sava gave up *all* of his wealth and power for the sake of the Lord. St. Philaret the Merciful was exponentially more generous with his riches than just the bare minimum. When the Lord tells the young man very plainly that what he must do is exchange his earthly riches for heavenly riches, to give all that he has to the poor and come and follow Him, the rich man walks away sad, because his attachment to earthly wealth and possessions is greater than his love for God. Our Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself, is standing right in front of him and inviting him to be his disciple. Can any earthly possession or can money really be greater than the incredible invitation that this man has received from God Himself? Yet the man's selfish attachment to money and earthly pleasure and possessions overcomes his ability to answer the Lord's call. Sheer madness!

Brothers and sisters, doesn't our Lord Jesus Christ stand here right now in front of us all? Are not the actual true Body and true Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ about to be offered on the altar today? Doesn't our Savior give all of us the same invitation to give generously with a cheerful heart proportionately according to our means, and not just the bare minimum, and come and follow Him? How many of us miss the point and don't make the connection that we are *all* receiving here and now and always, in the church, the same amazing and incredible invitation that He made more than two thousand years ago to the rich young man? And how many of us, like the rich young man, reject the Lord's invitation? St. Sava did not reject the

Lord's invitation. St. Philaret the Merciful did not reject the Lord's invitation. The Lives of the Saints are filled with thousands of pages of biographies of those who accepted the Lord's invitation because they loved the Lord more than anything else in this world, and therefore the main goal of their lives was to seek the eternal life of the Kingdom of Heaven. May we all accept the invitation to exchange the treasure that moth and rust consume for the heavenly treasure which is eternal, and then come to our Savior and follow Him into life everlasting. Amen!

