

**ON THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE**  
**30th Sunday After Pentecost**  
**By Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, January 27, 2013**  
**Moscow, Cathedral of the Icon of the Mother of God “Joy of All Who Sorrow”**  
**on Bolshaya Ordynka**

We heard the narrative from the Gospel of Luke about how one of the rulers (in Matthew he is called “a young man”) came up to Jesus and asked what he must do in order to inherit eternal life. The Lord said to him: *“You know the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother”*. The young man answered: *“All these I have observed from my youth”*. Then our Savior, seeing that the youth sought greater perfection than simply keeping the Old Testament commandments, said to him: *“Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and come follow me”*. The young man became sad and departed from Jesus grieved and in a quandary, because, as it says in the Gospel, he was very rich. The disciples then asked Jesus: *“Who then can be saved”*? — for the Lord said, looking at this young man, that it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord answered them: *“What is impossible with men is possible with God”* (Luke 18:20-27).

The subject of this Gospel speaks about the various paths to salvation. The rich young man who came to Jesus was not a bad person by common standards. Quite the opposite, he was a man of good works, because, unlike many others, he kept the commandments of God. However, when the Lord invited this inquirer to follow Him and to give away his riches, that is to say, to deny himself of everything which he had acquired and which he also apparently inherited from his ancestors, then the young man became confused and uncertain and understood that this path was not for him.

The rich young man did not deserve condemnation from the point of view of men, nor from the point of view of Divine justice because he kept the commandments given to us by God. In the Old Testament God did not command people to give away all of their wealth. Quite the opposite, in Old Testament times there was a notion that a rich man was a man who had been blessed by God and the poor were perceived as second class people. It was Christ when He came into this world Who began to say that it is not the rich and the self-satisfied who are blessed, but those who are poor in spirit, that the ones who should rejoice and not weep are not those who enjoy the kindness of people towards them, but those who are persecuted, despised and insulted.

This is an entirely new morality which our Lord Jesus Christ brought into this world. It was far from immediately before it was accepted and by far it was not accepted by all. Since then and until now, how many people have been and are ready to give away all their possessions in order to follow Christ, as did some of the saints who gave up everything that they had and took up the cross to follow Christ by accepting the humble monastic way of life? The Lord offers various paths to salvation. There exists the path of Christian maximalism — that path which was taken by many saints after having given up everything for the sake of Christ, like the merchant who sold all that he had in order to buy the one pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45). According to human standards this behavior is insane: to sell all that you have in order to buy some kind of pearl. What is the person going to do with it? However, if this pearl is God Himself, if this jewel of great price encompasses faith in God and following the path of Christ, then the point is to give up everything in order to find this one pearl. This, namely, is what the Lord proposed to the rich young man.

Not few are the people in the world who are rich. The Lord, of course, is not saying that the path to the Kingdom of Heaven is closed to them, because a person can relate to his wealth in different ways and use it in different ways. If someone with all his soul is attached to his earthly possessions and if for him their acquisition is more dear than human life, if he is prepared to transgress the commandments of God and the norms of human morality in order

to add to his wealth even only a little, then of course, such a person is on the path to perdition. However, if a person treats his wealth not as a master but with stewardship, remembering that this property is either inherited from his ancestors or accumulated by himself thanks to talents received from God, if he uses his wealth so that it brings benefit to other people, then for such a person not only is the path to the Kingdom of Heaven not closed, but on the contrary, he is fulfilling the commandments of God, because, in fact, he distributes his wealth - even if not all and not immediately - in order for other people to live better.

Everything that we have is a gift from God, even if it has been earned with our own hands. We must remember, that if we managed to earn and acquire something, it was only because God gave us the ability, the health, the appropriate skills and conditions, gave us something that many other people do not have and are therefore unable to acquire the same as we have.

In the end, it's about how we relate to our own life. If we consider ourselves to be the masters of our life and the rightful owners of those benefits that are in our hands, then one day the same thing can happen to us which occurred with the rich man from the parable of our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 12:16-20), about the man who accumulated a lot of wealth and whose barns were filled to the brim with grain and decided: "Now I have everything that is necessary for happiness. *"My soul, take your ease, eat, drink and be merry"*. But the Lord said to him: *"Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be"?*

The Lord brought us into this world in order for us to bring goodness to the people around us and to succeed in actively doing good deeds. We are called upon to share with our neighbors that which we have received from God. If this would be our attitude concerning our personal wealth, with all of the earthly blessings which we have accumulated, then no one can condemn us and the Lord will not condemn us. If a person's soul is so attached to the earthly valuables that are in his hands and does not want to share them with other people, if he is sorry to part with these valuables, then even if he is not rich he will not be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the *eye of the needle* of which our Lord spoke (Luke 18:25). This is the narrow path which is open for every person. The narrow path leads to salvation, but the wide path — to perdition, and the latter is also open for everyone, but it is up to us to choose which path we will take.

There are some people, such as the rich young man, who are called by God to a special and radical path of self-denial. These people enter the path of monasticism, walk along it and at least some of them reach salvation and the Kingdom of God. However, there are some people who are called to a path of which the Lord says: *"You know the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother"* (Luke 18:20). By keeping this calling of the Lord a person can also reach salvation.

Let us listen attentively to what the Lord says to us. Let us try to recognize the path that the Lord calls us to which will bring us to the Kingdom of Heaven.

***Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen***