



## 9TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

### November 20

### THE GOSPEL READING

#### Luke 12:16-21

[Against Greed and Anxiety]

*The Lord said this parable: "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." As he said these things, he cried out: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

### THE SERMON

Wisdom is the ability to see our lives, the world, and reality from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. It is the ability to see beyond this temporal world. Wisdom helps us understand the greater meaning of our lives, actions, desires, and destiny. To be wise is to be humble and thankful for all God has given us. It is to realize that the past, the present, and the future all exist as a preparation for eternal life, an anticipation for the eternal Kingdom of God.

In this parable, the Lord Jesus teaches us about a rich man who owned a profitable land. In that society at that time, the rich people were the ones who owned cattle and



land. This man, however, possessed riches but did not possess wisdom. He was rich in this world but he was not rich towards God because he could see neither his riches nor his life in the broader context of the Kingdom of God. He did not understand that his riches were a gift from God. He wanted to keep it all for himself, without considering the poor and the needy and without realizing that his own life would one day end, and he would not be able to carry any wealth on to the next life.

The Apostle Paul tells us that those rich in this present age should not be arrogant nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God. He says, "Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). The rich man in the passage was not unwise because he was rich, since there is nothing wrong with riches in and of themselves. His lack of wisdom relates precisely to what the Apostle Paul teaches. The rich man was not only prideful, but he did not trust in God, trusting instead in his riches. He was not ready to give and unwilling to share because he wanted to always accumulate for this life instead of laying a foundation for eternal life.

The Greek word for "sin" (ἁμαρτία) means missing the target. If we make the things of this world our ultimate target, we chase after the wind. To worry about selfishly accumulating things in this world is like trying to store water in a leaking pool. We will not be able to take anything material out of this life. We will not carry material riches into the Kingdom of God. Everything we have is a provision from God, given for our sustenance, enjoyment, and sharing with those in need.

The rich man in this parable speaks to his own soul. We read this in different passages of Scripture, for example, the famous lines from the beginning of Psalm 102: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and everything within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His rewards." In this parable, however, the rich man is not speaking to his soul — that is, to his own heart — to bless God and thank Him for all the gifts He has given him. On the contrary, he speaks to himself to plan how to accumulate wealth and live selfishly in this life.

His crops yielded much, and the rich man became even richer. He now plans to build a bigger barn to keep it all for himself. He thinks, "I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.'" His heart was grounded only in *this* life, as he loved and hoped for the accumulation of riches and enjoyment of earthly pleasure. Arrogance can destroy our soul and make our spiritual growth and salvation unnecessarily difficult. It distances us from God. He wants us to live a humble life on earth, working for our daily needs but caring above all about our spiritual life.

The Lord Jesus calls the rich man out of his selfish dream, pointing out his foolishness and telling him that his time in *this* life is over. He would not be able to enjoy riches and pleasure anymore, and he would not be able to take a penny into the next life. His

barn would stay behind, but the soul he sought to comfort with worldly riches would move on and find itself poor towards God. In the end, instead of being rich he became poor, because true wealth is wisdom and love, not selfishness.

The Lord reminds the man that in his selfishness, he did not even accumulate things for his loved ones. He wanted it all for himself, but now that he was departing this life, the riches would be left for someone else. The Lord says the man's problem was that he laid up treasures for himself but was not rich toward God. It is important to notice that the problem was not the riches themselves because one can have riches and use them for the glory of God. The problem was that he was not rich towards God. The selfish desire for riches can afflict the rich and the poor. The problem is that wealth does not endure eternally, but we do.

Saint Gregory Palamas says that the rich man did not imitate God because he did not share his possessions with the needy, whereas God freely shares His good things with everyone. He says, "we must share what we have with those who are poor of His sake, and so be saved through them. Let us acquire merciful hearts and give positive proof of brotherly love and towards devotion to the Father and Master of all." To be rich towards God is to be rich in love and generosity. When we are spiritually rich we teach others with our Christlike life and we can lead and guide them towards salvation.

The greatest riches in this world are communion with God, peace, and love. These only come by trusting God above all else and desiring Him over everything this world offers. Saint Porphyrios says, "Complete trust in God – that's what holy humility is." By sharing what God gives us with the needy, we love God and our neighbor. In this way, our wealth of peace and joy increases, laying a foundation for eternal life.

God is the creator of all things, and all things belong to Him. He gives us generously and provides for all our needs because He loves us as a Father who provides for His children. When we receive His gifts with thankful hearts, we become rich towards God. When we use the riches we have to provide for the needy, the Church, and our loved ones, we become spiritually rich.

Selflessness and generosity bring joy and peace from God. It makes us rich with God. The more we give, the more blessings we receive from Him, even eternal life. No one can outgive God. Let us always trust our Father, Who provides us with every good gift from above, and let us imitate Him in using riches with love and generosity, for the benefit of others, as a means towards the Kingdom of God.