



## THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF LUKE

### November 26

### THE GOSPEL READING

#### Luke 18:18-27

[The Rich Young Man]

*At that time, a ruler came to Jesus and asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.' " And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For 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." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."*

### THE SERMON

There are many things in life that we need and many things that we desire. However, we need one thing the most, and therefore this one thing we seek above all: Christ Himself. To trust Him above all things is to put our entire life in that perspective. It means *reordering* our priorities in relation to Him and considering all things relative to our relationship with



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God. It means to trust Christ above all things by putting our will and our lives, as it were, in the palm of His hands.

The story of the rich young ruler appears in the middle of two other stories that teach complete dependency upon Christ. In the preceding passage, Christ teaches us that we should trust Him like children, in total dependence. The passage after shows how the Apostles trusted Christ and left everything for Him. In this passage, Christ teaches the rich young ruler and us that we are to set our hearts on God above all things.

The rich young man is called a “ruler,” that is, he is a member of the Jewish religious leadership. Like his peers, he was trying to learn about this Teacher who was doing miracles and preaching about eternal life. He comes to Jesus and asks, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This is the most crucial question, for to inherit eternal life is the greatest human hope.

The young ruler approaches Jesus out of his desire to find the way to salvation. He is a faithful young man whose heart burns to please God. Only God is good, and the rich young ruler asks the Son of God Himself, the Source of goodness, what one needs to do to inherit eternal life. The answer is that eternal life is found by following Christ in complete dependence.

This is an essential lesson for the rich young ruler because it presents him with a challenge to consider his own life differently. A child needs a provider, but the rich young ruler was utterly self-sufficient. A child relies on its parents, but he relies on his wealth and virtues. In other words, a self-reliant mindset and a supreme desire for things in this world are the conditions that make us *unlike* children. Consequently, this mindset can take us far from the Kingdom of God, because God calls us to trust Him as children trust their parents.

Christ calls us not to worry about our life, that is, what we will eat or drink, nor about our body, that is, what we will wear, for our Father in Heaven knows the things we need before we ask Him. He calls us not to worry because we can trust Him. We are to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first, and these things shall be provided to us.

The rich young ruler trusted in his riches, and he also relied on his righteousness, saying he had kept the commandments of the Law of Moses since he was very young. But Jesus invited him to sell all he had and distribute it to the poor, and follow Him. Jesus’ call to the young ruler gets at the root of the issue in his life and in our lives. God knows us individually, and because of His love for us, He gives us the specific prescription that grants us healing so we can be truly united with Him.

The Saints teach us to trust God and to imitate Him. For example, once when counseling a rich man, Saint Kosmas Aitolos did not ask him to give alms to the poor, which would have been very easy for him. Instead, Saint Kosmas asked the man to fast since he had to deny himself and keep from the gourmet food readily available to him. By

contrast, when counseling a poor man, Saint Kosmas did not ask him to fast, which was easy because he had little food, but instead to give alms out of his poverty. God always provides us with the medicine we need in His love for us as individuals.

The rich young ruler was self-sufficient, and Christ calls him to become like a child, to desire nothing but God Himself, and to trust Him fully. This is how the young man can inherit eternal life, and this is how we can inherit eternal life. Sometimes, we are pleased with our accomplishments, especially with the notion that we keep the commandments and are “good Christians.” We may even think that we are entitled to salvation. However, while it is relatively easy to follow rules, they do not grant us the Kingdom of God. Only childlike trust in God, complete dependence on Him, and selfless love for Him and others can bring us to His Kingdom.

The rich young man desired to please God, but he also greatly desired his riches. In this way, he was conflicted, seeking to serve two masters. Christ is full of mercy, love, and compassion for him. Jesus teaches us that, although we are all struggling daily with worldly matters, we need to give everything to God, including our struggles. To give everything to Him, in a sense, means to “Let go and let God.” We see many examples of this.

All the Saints gave up their lives for the love of God. Martyrs were not afraid to die rather than deny their faith in Christ. Monastics left riches, family, friends, and every worldly bond behind to dedicate themselves to the teachings of the Gospel. Holy Hierarchs and priests lived to offer the Holy Sacraments and spread the Good News of a loving God for the salvation of this world. Holy women taught the Gospel with their exemplary lives.

All those were human beings like the young ruler and like us. They struggled and redirected their hearts to Christ. They did not turn their back on the One who took the sins of the world upon Himself. God was their *highest* priority.

The difficulty for the rich young ruler was not that he had riches, but that he trusted in them *above* all else. Christ teaches us that He is the One Who provides us with all things, and our trust is in Him alone. He invites us to ask ourselves, what is our true treasure, our true love? What do we desire above all? What is our highest priority?

Saint Basil the Great says, “He does not tell us to sell our goods, because they are by nature evil, for then they would not be God’s creatures; He, therefore, does not bid us cast them away as if they were bad but distribute them; nor is anyone condemned for possessing them, but for abusing them.” Jesus says, “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.”

The image of a camel going through the eye of the needle is a simple analogy of impossibility. However, it is not the riches that create the impossibility, but the love of wealth. Apart from the love and grace of God, we cannot find eternal life. This is true whether we are rich or poor because when we love things – anything – more than the God who loves us, we live selfishly and close ourselves to Him.

What is impossible with man is possible with God because this is the will of the God who loves us and has redeemed us. To trust the Lord in all things is to have a treasure in Heaven. What is possible with God is what God desires, which is to save us and unite us with Him. He is our Father in Heaven, Who gives us all we need.