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St. Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral
November 04, 2018
23rd Sunday after Pentecost

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SLAVA ISUSU KHRYSTU!

Is it a sin to be rich? Is it a blessing to be poor? Usually when we approach things according to the standards of today's culture, we would say quite the opposite, wouldn't we? When we encounter someone who is financially well off, we account them as lucky, even blessed by God. In the same vein, when we come across someone who is poor, or not financially successful, we consider them to be *not* blessed by God, we even use terms like "down on his luck." We call them "unfortunate." In today's parable, the Lord puts a different scenario before us. He shows us a scene where quite the opposite seems to be true in God's eyes. In this parable, we find that at the end of his life, the rich man finds himself in Hades, and Lazarus is in Paradise with Abraham. And, at first look, it would seem that the only reason the rich man is in Hades is because he is rich. The sole reason Lazarus is in Paradise, seemingly, is nothing else except that he was poor. So the question remains: Is Christ telling us it is sinful to be rich and blessed to be poor? Does our Lord really want us to live in utter poverty and destitute on the streets? Does financial success keep us out of heaven and condemn us to eternal punishment in the next life? I think if we stop here as the explanation of today's Gospel reading, we are missing the message our Savior has for us today.

You see, if we were listening closely to the beginning of the the selection, we would hear just a few words that are very important qualifiers. These few words would help explain God's outlook on financial success and poverty.

In the very first verse we are told that the rich man was clothed in purple, a royal color in the ancient world, not everybody wore purple, usually only those who could afford the dye that would make the clothes purple; and it was so expensive usually only royalty could afford it. He wore fine linen; which is another expensive fabric, and fared sumptuously. He didn't just fare; he fared sumptuously. And, what's more, he just didn't dress this way, and eat this way, and live this way occasionally. He dressed this way, and lived this way and ate this way, everyday! While he continued this life in this manner, poor Lazarus was laying at his gate. Our Lord is very graphic in His description of Lazarus. Lazarus was poor, hungry, sick and covered with sores, starving. You see, Lazarus was not out of the rich man's notice. He was laying at his gate. Everyday. It would be impossible for the rich man not to notice him. He would have to go out his gate everyday, wouldn't he? Why didn't the rich man do something about Lazarus? Why didn't he help him? Why didn't he use the great riches with which he had been blessed to alleviate Lazarus' sufferings? And here, my brothers and sisters, we see the sin. It was indifference to his fellow man's sufferings. He definitely was able to help Lazarus. Did he really need to "party" everyday? Did he really need to dress in such finery everyday? Couldn't he have just given up one day of such extravagant living to help his fellow man? You see, my brothers and sisters, it's not riches that make a man evil, but how riches very often have an effect on a person that make him or her indifferent to others. Riches very often make one only conscience of themselves. They don't realize that riches are a gift of God, given for the purpose of enjoyment, but also to help and share with others.

Let us look at Lazarus, for a moment. We see that he, of course, did not have riches, but instead sufferings. Does he complain? Does he demand that he be invited into the house with the rich man? Does he shake his fists at the heavens and curse God and the rich man for his existence? We see in Lazarus an example of patience, long-suffering and forbearance. He only longs for the crumbs that fall off the rich man's table. And this is the key to why Lazarus is in Paradise at Abraham's bosom.

Our Savior is calling to us today to take stock of ourselves. How have we used the blessings God has given us? Including our financial resources. Have we used them to help others or have we been miserly with them? Have we even recognized them as gifts from God? Have we acknowledged God as the Giver of these gifts, including the financial ones? We all have riches in one form or another. God has given each of us blessings, in many forms, very often in financial forms. Do we use them for His glory? Being a Christian, my brothers in sisters, means having responsibility. There's no getting away from it. Receiving blessings means a responsibility.

It is often true, that we all come upon periods and times when things are difficult for us. Do we complain and whine and curse God for our misfortune? Are we jealous of others for their good fortune? Or can we honestly identify ourselves as someone like Lazarus- patient, long-suffering and forbearing?

It's not a sin to be rich, nor is it a blessing to be poor, my brothers and sisters, provided we know how to act in each case. Our character in this life, and our use of God's blessings shows what kind of reward we deserve in the afterlife. In a manner of speaking, it really should be no surprise when we get there.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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