

## **Homily for the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Matthew)**

Fr Dc. Filip

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, One God.

Today on the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost we heard the Gospel reading of Saint Matthew concerning the young man who asked Christ what needs to be done in order to obtain eternal life.

First of all our Lord Jesus Christ tells the young man that the first requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven is that he must keep the commandments from the Law of Moses.

Why does Jesus tell the young man this? He does this to remind us first and foremost that “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I did not come to destroy but to fulfil.” (Matthew 5:17)

Then He reminds us by quoting these commandments to the young man, that entry into the kingdom of heaven is just as simple as what the Holy Prophet King David said in the Psalms “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psalm 34:14)

If we look more closely at today’s Gospel we notice that Christ only mentions six of the Ten Commandments.

Saint Nikolaj Velimirovic says that our Lord used these six commandments because they had special significance to this young man. Saint Nikolaj explains them as follows:

“You shall not murder” means that the over pampering of the body with riches and luxury kills the soul.

“You shall not commit adultery” means that the soul is intended for God as a bride for her husband. If it occupies itself with love for worldly riches... then it commits adultery against its immortal Husband God.

“You shall not steal” means that we should not steal from the soul for the body’s benefit.

“You shall not bear false witness” means that we should not in any way justify the love for riches and the neglect of the soul

“Honour your father and your mother” means that we should not honour only ourselves, but honour our father and mother by which we came into the world, that in this way we may honour God by whom we came into the world.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” means that we should love others in order to discipline ourselves, and bring ourselves down to equality with others in our eyes.

Unfortunately we all too often look at the commandments of God as just being simple requirements. We kind of consider them as a check list, where we tick off the commandments that we have kept and not much more. What we do not see, when we look at them in this manner, is the deeper spiritual meaning which is attached to them.

By acting in this manner we are no better than the Pharisee who justified himself before God by saying “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess, and so on.” (Luke 18:12).

Our Lord and saviour notices that the young man is not seeing the deeper spiritual meaning of these commandments. So our Lord confronts the young man with a higher standard of perfection in order to see the deeper spiritual meaning of the commandments and says “go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

To be perfect, and here it is meant in a purely spiritual manner, one must willingly sacrifice all and follow Christ. Nothing is gained unless this sacrifice is given freely. The details and the manner of how one follows Christ will be different for each person.

The only way this young man would be able to get entry into the kingdom of heaven would be by him selling and giving away all his possessions. Saint Chrysostom tells us that giving away possessions is the least of Christ’s instructions here; following Him in all things is a far greater and more difficult calling.

In other words, how hard it is for those who become so attached to their riches, so enslaved to their material possessions, that they cannot let go because their possessions have become their god.

Like the young man in today’s Gospel lesson, how many people are there today who want everything that Christ has to offer: forgiveness, peace, assurance of life eternal with God — but they don’t want to let go of their false gods, their tormenting sins, the god of Mammon.

However, if we examine Christ's words more closely we can see that He does not say that the rich have absolutely no chance to be saved. No, what He says is that those who stay attached to their riches, and will not let go of them, cannot be saved.

And this is the great tragedy for the soul of the young man. He walked away, full of sorrow, for he had 'great possessions'. In other words, the discerning eyes of Christ saw that the young man was unlike those disciples who had abandoned their fishing-boat in order to follow the Saviour; it was not so much that the young man had many possessions, but rather that he was possessed by his possessions, he could not let go of them.

Then Jesus turns to his disciples and explains why it will be so hard for a rich people to enter the kingdom of Heaven

**“Again I tell you, 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.” When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

Various interpretations have been suggested for the impossible image of a camel going through the eye of a needle: e.g. that the word was not camel but “rope”; or that the eye of a needle was a city gate in Jerusalem, which opened after the main gate was closed at night, through which a camel might barely squeeze if it were first unloaded of all its baggage, symbolising wealth. Even the Talmud uses the expression “for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle”.

Whatever the phrase refers to, it displays the impossibility of salvation for those who are attached to riches. This is clearly evidenced by the disciples response, “Who then can be saved?” Yet by God’s grace, even what is impossible to man can come to pass.

We see the answer to the question “who then can be saved” in these righteous men because they were not bound in their hearts to earthly riches, but to God. So we can see through these men what our Lord meant when he said “without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) The apostle Paul further confirms this when he said to the Philippians “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

God wants each of us to invest all that we are and have, in loving and serving Him and our neighbour, so that we may be completely united with Him.

To be liberated is to be independent of all the control of the devil’s glory, and not to allow our possessions to possess us. We must use our possessions as a means of glorifying God. Then we can take up Jesus’ call, “If you would be perfect, go, sell

what you possess, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me.”

So what each of us must do is, instead of investing in possessions, property and other worldly goods, is the following: we must put into our lives an investment of loving and serving mankind, so that our Heavenly Father can rejoice in us and will not need to be sorrowful like he was with the young man.

Amen