

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, NOVEMBER 12/25, 2007

EPH 5: 9-19

ST. LUKE 12: 16-21

by

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Gospel: *And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:*

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

He that trusts in wealth shall fall; but he that helps righteous men shall rise.¹

Avarice can be destroyed “by compassion for the poor”.²

A brother had sought Christ’s decision on an inheritance issue with his brother because of the Lord’s position as “Rabbi”.³ Christ rejects his request because he asked the wrong question. He did not seek useful/beneficial things for his salvation. Instead, his entire emphasis is on the material, the “earthly and temporal things”.⁴ He sent the man away cautioning *both* brothers to reign in their greed.⁵ He points out that owning things or having great wealth won’t increase one’s lifespan. Concentrating on the quest for material possessions ensures (“it is certain”) that his life will be squandered in such endeavours.⁶

The Parable of the Rich Fool -

The rich man who intended to hoard everything for himself, even by building sufficient storehouses for it, rejected Mosaic Law because he did not intend to become more generous as he accumulated; rather, he was to receive everything. There was no room for God! Where was the rich man’s spirituality in his striving for the ‘maximisation’ of his coffers? Just the point. He had forgotten God. He thought everything he accumulated was his, but we really borrow from God, Who has issued us a ‘license’ to till in His garden.

This parable is spiritual proof that bigger is not better. The Lord blessed the rich man's crops so they would be plentiful. Did he think about this blessing? No... What is gained by the avarice displayed by the rich fool in today's Gospel? It doesn't take a genius to operate on the basis of "Eat, drink, and be merry". He was an unobservant fool, was he not? See his concentration upon himself- where is *he* going to gather his crops, *his* fruits and *his* goods? *He* is going to have these surplus goods "laid up for many years". He dwells upon these goods as *his alone* as if their growth resulted entirely from *his* own efforts.⁷ When he took this posture, he ousted the real owner, God, from ownership, so he thought perhaps, but, not really. Our lives are God's, and we are His stewards. The rich fool believes he is in charge of his destiny. If we fail to acknowledge Christ's ownership and do not act as His stewards, we run the risk of being like the Gospel's rich fool.

He was a fool "because everything he wanted was foolish".⁸ He believed he could guarantee his longevity, but only God can do so. At any time, we may be called to leave this world. *When* is God's call, not an individual's, or a group's or a nation's or a group of nations'. We are fools if we think we can arrange our time here on earth, "...the length of a man's life rests with God alone ... no man can set the limits of his own life".⁹

Notice the generosity of God to the rich fool in contrast to him. The Lord "made the crops and possessions of the rich man increase, and multiplied the fruits of his labour, (so as) to call him to generosity and charity and leave him no excuse;"...¹⁰ The rich man's hardheartedness, however, interfered with his common humanity, and he did not see the justice in sharing his surplus with the poor. He could only see the need for more storehouses in the midst of his plenty. He was never satisfied (aren't we all like that in varying degrees?). He complained like the pauper, who grieves because he doesn't have even the bare necessities of life. The Fathers say it isn't even right for the poor to speak this way. They should endure their lot and give thanks to God for all things. Since the poor have this responsibility to God, "much more so should the rich be wise and give thanks in all things, since, they receive gifts and good things from God in abundance".¹¹

See how our insatiability for wealth, accumulation, interferes with our Christian duties to our fellow man? Wealth cannot confer peace of mind.¹² Remember, though, that wealth itself is not evil; otherwise, the Lord would not have increased the crops and possessions for the man in the parable. The evil occurs with the misuse of wealth; the failure to manage it as God's steward and the disinclination to share it with anyone else.¹³ At the same time, wealth is not good in itself; rather, it is "neutral in terms of virtue". Whether it is good depends upon whether those using it use it well, i.e., "for necessary and rightful purposes, and for helping the poor".¹⁴

Failure to get our lives in order and act charitably and compassionately as Christ would have us do places our souls in immediate jeopardy. The sinner will be claimed *this* night, the night meaning:

Truly it is at night when the soul of such a sinner is demanded of him. It is night for this sinner who is *darkened* (emphasis supplied) by the love of wealth, and into whom the light of divine knowledge cannot penetrate, and death overtakes him.¹⁵

Had he laid up his treasures for the poor and God, his result would have been different.

Brethren,

Trust in God, not ourselves and be charitable with our good fortunes, which come from God. “For the gifts of good deeds return back to the giver, and unfailing is the wealth of charity.”¹⁶

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Proverbs 11:28.

² St. John of Damaskos, *On the Virtues and the Vices*, in *The Philokalia, Vol. Two* (compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth; tr. from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware), p. 338.

³ St. Luke 12:13-15.

⁴ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 145.

⁵ *id.*

⁶ *id.*, pp.145-146.

⁷ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 520.

⁸ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p.147 and see pp.146-148 for his entire explanation of today’s Gospel.

⁹ *id.*, p. 148.

¹⁰ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

¹¹ *id.*, p. 519.

¹² *id.*

¹³ *id.*, p. 520.

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 522.

¹⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁶ Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 525.