

**3RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JUNE 4/17, 2007**

ROMANS 5: 1-10

ST. MATTHEW 6: 22-33

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Possessory Greed Substitutes For God's Help

Love of money/possessions is the worst vice, the root of all evil (I Tim. 6: 10). Those so disposed substitute their possessions for God's assistance "Lovers of money hope in gold, and not in God." This spiritual sickness is the root of every evil. In today's Gospel, the Lord wishes "to deliver us from the love of money and all the woes that spring from it".¹

Light Versus Darkness

Christ, the Master teacher, instructs us to save for ourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth. Heaven's treasures are

incorruptible, unending and ever-abiding, while the treasures which are on earth last **but a little while** (emphasis supplied), being corruptible and perishable.²

Then He uses a parable about Light versus darkness. Your eye, if healthy, lights up your body “but a sickly eye darkens it”. “As the eye is to the body, so the mind is to the soul.” Thus, if your mind is pure and concentrates on what is good, true and divine, it ‘lights up’ and purifies your soul:

But if the mind be turned toward evil, and be possessed by worry about property or by passionate desire, and be attached to these things, then it is blinded and darkened, the soul also becomes dark, much more than the bodily eye.³

The mind enlightens the body and soul, “becomes ‘dark’ through desires for possessions and other passions of this world. When the mind becomes dark in this way, it has a **disproportionate** effect on the soul and body. The mind is the light of the soul and body; when it “goes out,” goes dark, there is no further hope for salvation.⁴ We need a pure mind to **light** our way to the Kingdom of God!

A pure mind is needed by those who “hold offices of spiritual or temporal authority”. These are to “enlighten and guide men to good and saving ways, and to preserve them from all harm, assault and malice”.⁵ If these officeholders’ minds are darkened by evil thoughts, intentions, and actions, those they serve, the people, suffer. The people need pure spiritual leadership and authority from these.

So, each of us must be a light to the world following the example of Christ as given to the Apostles:

Thus, the holy and divine Apostles were constituted as the eyes and light of the whole world, and the Lord, therefore instructed them, saying, If ye, being the lights of the body, stand firm and do not waver, the whole body of the world will be enlightened; however, if ye, being the salt, are **spoiled**, if ye, being the light, **become dark, how much greater** (emphases supplied) will be that darkness which is in the world.⁶

So, don’t stress money accumulation: “If you fill your mind with worries over money, you have extinguished the lamp and darkened your soul.”⁷

God And Mammon

Mammon is to be understood as unrighteousness/injustice. We must choose between it and our Lord. We cannot have both. No one can serve two masters. This legal principle comes from Christ! We can’t love our possessions and God, too, **if** we use them unjustly. If we do, this is mammon, unrighteousness.

Mammon is every injustice. If we obtain our possessions through deception, fraud, evil intent, they become mammon. Mammon is man's god, not the Christ Who came to provide the only avenue for our salvation. "Many possessions, however, are amassed through injustice."⁸ But not all. It is possible to be rich and also friends of God as long as we use our wealth in a righteous manner:

Let us disperse our riches as much as possible, and give them to the poor, so that our righteousness may endure unto the ages.⁹

Bill Gates, the computer whiz and corporate magnet, and his wife serve as positive role models for the management of wealth. They are "giving back" immense sums, which will benefit the poor and otherwise needy. Many other examples exist of both money donations and service, e.g., the young American Idol singing sensation Clay Aiken serves as an Ambassador for children to the U.N. He voluntarily visits African countries, Indonesia and Afghanistan, donating his time, energies and money to those unfortunate souls. He also started a very successful charity for autism, called the Bubel-Aiken Foundation.

People who donate large (or otherwise) sums of money for the needy and do so **anonymously** are, in particular, to be spiritually admired.

Reject The Acquisitive American 'Culture': Look Within, Not Without!

Don't be overly concerned about your possessions, what you eat, or where, or what you drink, how you look, or for the clothes you put on:

Insomuch as possessions separate us from God, the Lord **commands** (emphasis supplied) us not to be concerned with them, nor to exhaust ourselves with the worries of greed and desire.... Take no thought for your soul, what it will eat or drink.¹⁰

[Compare the seamless garment of Christ and the 'apparel' of St. John the Baptist with some of today's clerics. You know the kind I mean who wear \$1,500 to \$2,000 suits, expensive gold cufflinks, fancy handkerchiefs, the latest in shiny black shoes, live in multi-million dollar estates, drive around or are driven around in new Lincolns, and even have their own jets!]

Understand that the Lord doesn't forbid work; and, in fact, those who don't are not to eat. According to St. Paul:

*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if anyone is **not willing** (emphasis supplied) to work, neither let him eat. (2 Thess. 3: 10)*

What He does forbid is to "give oneself **entirely over** to earthly cares, to the **neglect** of God".¹¹ Looked at positively, "Not only does it behoove us to despise gold and all the

pleasures of this world; we are not to worry even about necessary nourishment.”¹² We are to work according to our abilities but concentrate on the salvation of our souls and look “to God alone, Who gives food to the hungry and fills our life with good things”.¹³

How do God’s Divine instructions and commandments jibe with modern secular American society? Not very well, to put it mildly.

We are inundated with daily advertisements, on TV, the Internet, newspapers, magazines, pushing our decadent society’s latest pleasure kick. Everything is geared toward pleasure and the avoidance of pain. We are told “we are worth it”.

Women, in particular, are victimised by the marketing moguls. Every cream, oil, fragrance imaginable are touted to improve their skin so they may more effectively compete in the “meat market”. No crotch shot is missed by the photographers. This is the “hook” to keep you within their economic snare.

Little, if any, products are marketed which improve the consumers’ inner selves, their hearts. Such ‘products’ would not go down well with the vaunted and such sought after 18-49- year old market!

The standard of television is pitiful, especially when compared to periods such as the 50s or early 60s. Newton Minow, appointed Head of the Federal Communications Commission in 1961, even then called television “the vast wasteland”. Oh, what would he say today when television seems to be operated primarily for the benefit of the average ‘Jerry Springer viewer’.

Hip hop ‘artists’ jam unbelievably filthy lyrics down our throats as they simultaneously grope their crotches on prime time evening television slots. Violence is thoroughly embedded in much of the programming. And, of course, it seems that almost every sitcom has to have the mandatory gay flitting about, apparently as a sop to their political base. [Their percentage of the population, nationally, is very low, but as ‘Hollyweird’ is disproportionately left wing so too is the gay influence on television and the media in general.]

There are even criminal charges being brought against believers who express their beliefs. Nativity shows are canceled because they might offend 1 or 2% of the populace. A Muslim has more freedom of expression than Christians. Obviously, Christ is not politically correct. We should shout it out loud and clear that we are ready to suffer this societal discrimination, but we will never give up our love for and faith in Christ!

Look within ourselves, our hearts, not without, not on what is external. As true Orthodox Christians, we are to look **inward** first. We must clean up our own act.

We Are Powerless To Add Anything To Our Stature

God accomplishes what He wills. You and I cannot add or subtract to His boundaries. Our bodies grow “by His grace and providence,” not because of food.¹⁴ Our lives are full

of toil, pain and sorrow, but this is the cross we have voluntarily accepted. The suffering can be expected to intensify as the Antichrist nears. So be it!

Clothing Is A Matter Of Faith: Seek Righteousness, Not Luxury And Excess

Christ shows us with His example of the lilies in the field. No matter what lengths we would go to, we can never be as beautifully adorned as they are. Even the great Solomon “the most wise and splendid, with all his kingdom at his disposal, could not array himself in such a manner”.¹⁵

The Lord provides the apparel we need. After all, if He has adorned (dressed) the little flowers, He will do it for us:

For if God adorned the lilies in such a manner, without any necessity to do so, how much more will He fulfill our own need for clothing?¹⁶

The clothes we wear should reflect on our spirituality; or, at the very least, not negate it. Fine clothes, designer shall we say, are like “a fleeting flower”. Mankind’s human glory is “like the flower of the grass; the grass dries up, and the flower is **gone** (emphasis supplied)”.¹⁷ We are not to emphasize our externality; rather, we are “to become even more beautiful in **soul** (emphasis supplied)”.¹⁸

Those who stew about these superfluous things are “*ye of little faith*”.¹⁹ Remember, though, Christ doesn’t bar us from eating, drinking, wearing clothes, but He does forbid “luxury and excess”.²⁰ It is the imbalance in favour of the secular that must be decisively tipped in the spiritual direction!

God wants us to enjoy all that is good. If we are spiritual, righteousness provides all we need in our living, God’s generosity will provide us all we need for physical life.²¹

Our emphasis should be for the safety and spiritual health of our souls:

Let us be concerned about the salvation of our souls. Let us turn away from wicked and worldly works, and let us push ourselves to do good works, that we may receive the promised blessings.²²

If we concentrate upon our inner spiritual development and cling to the rocky, sometimes precipitous Royal Path toward righteousness and salvation, God will reward us with the good of His kingdom. You’ve heard (or perhaps used) the expression that “Things will take care of themselves.” If you seek the kingdom and spiritually follow through, it’s true!

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

¹ *The Gospel Commentary (Lessons Taken from the Holy Gospel and from Many of the Divine Writings of Our Father among the Saints, John Chrysostom)* (translated from the Slavonic into English by Hieromonk German Ciuba, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, Pennsylvania, 2002, pp. 275-276.

² *ibid.*, p. 276.

³ *id.*, pp. 276-277.

⁴ *id.*, p. 277.

⁵ *id.*

⁶ *id.*, pp. 277-278.

⁷ Blessed Theophylact, *Explanations of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, Vol. I*, (translated from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade) Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 60.

⁸ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 278.

⁹ *id.*, p. 279.

¹⁰ *id.*

¹¹ *id.*, p. 280.

¹² *id.*

¹³ *id.*

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 281.

¹⁵ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 61..

¹⁶ *id.*

¹⁷ *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁸ *id.*

¹⁹ *id.*

²⁰ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

²¹ *id.*

²² *The Gospel Commentary, op. cit.*, pp. 283-284.