



My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Gospel, a wealthy young ruler approaches Christ. We know this man is respectful, because St. Matthew tells us that he "...came up to Jesus, kneeling and saying, *"Good Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?"* (Matthew 19:16) Clearly, this young man is genuinely interested in Christ's ministry, and so, Christ engages him in an honest dialogue.

He reminds the young man that God alone is good, and encourages him to seek *theosis*, to become more like our Creator. Jesus does this by reminding the Young Ruler of those commandments that deal with how we should act towards our fellow human beings: *"You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 19:18-19). It is here though that we see the young man's pride, because he says, *"All these I have observed; what do I still lack?"* (Matthew 19:20)

Unlike the Pharisees who question Christ to try to trap Him, this Ruler is not evil, but his wealth has fed his ego. Notice that he did not say of the Commandments, "All these I have tried to observe..." From the easy way he answers, it appears that he truly believes he has never failed. As the Creator of all, Christ knows that this kind of self-reliance is unreal, for He later tells the Disciples, *"...With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26). Seeing his lack of humility, Christ answers the young Ruler honestly and simply: *"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me"* (Matthew 19:21). The Ruler does not become angry, he does not try to argue with Jesus; instead, he leaves, greatly saddened, all because he is unwilling to think about losing his many possessions.

It seems to me that the Young Ruler knows Christ is not condemning wealth. Many important figures and Patriarchs of the Old Testament were blessed with wealth, because they found favor with God, and lived righteously. St. Matthew does not tell us how the Young Ruler earned his fortune, and it seems possible, because of his respect for Jesus & the Law of Moses, that he was an honest person. However, unlike Jacob or Job, this Young Ruler allowed his wealth to twist his sense of self. He truly believed that he was perfect, and he was unwilling to sacrifice his ego.

When Christ tells the disciples that *"...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"* our Lord says this, not to condemn, but instead to reveal money's true purpose: for our needs, and for the benefit of others (Matthew 19:23). We should not be sad and shocked, like the Ruler, or the Disciples. Instead, we should do as Christ says: put our trust in God, rather than in our own abilities and understanding, as we try to live in moderation and find more ways to use the many gifts God has given us, for the betterment of our world and our neighbors, all to the glory of His Holy Name.

+ALEXIOS

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