My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday’s Gospel demonstrates a very important lesson to all who strive to be true Christians. It begins when a Ruler approaches our Lord, asking Him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18)

Understanding the man to be testing Him, Jesus praises his knowledge, “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother’ (Luke 18:20). However, we do not have a solid foundation if, like the Ruler, we that this makes us perfect: “I have kept all these since my youth.” (Luke 18:21) No, Jesus says, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

The subject of money is a sensitive one. Perhaps some of you reading this are planning to participate in the shopping sales that will begin with Thanksgiving. As we said last week, Christ does not condemn money, He condemns greed. When Zacchaeus sees the error of his ways and promises to restore four-fold those he defrauded, Christ greets him as a member of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Christ seeks out Levi, also known as Matthew the tax collector, who gives up everything to follow Him. And, in last week’s parable, Christ condemned the Rich Fool, not for his wealth, but because the man believed his wealth protected him from death itself.

So then, do not then behave like the young Ruler, who after hearing Jesus, “…became sad; for he was very rich.” (Luke 18:23) Jesus is honest when he tells the Ruler of the struggles the wealthy will undergo to become true Christians: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24-25). Christ’s words are strong, and so the Evangelist tells us that those who heard Him were shocked, asking, “Then who can be saved?” (Luke 18:26) Christ, as God, knowing our human weaknesses responds that, “with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Luke 18:27).

Like the other Rich Man, who failed to show pity to Lazaros at his gate, Christ condemns those who put all their faith in their wealth, because it is yet another form of worship of the ego, and not worshipping the Creator who blessed us with the means and talents to earn it. As we prepare ourselves to welcome Christ born in a manger for our sakes, let us use the Thanksgiving holiday to meditate on how we might long as we seek to fulfill God’s Will instead of our own, by “distributing the money to the poor”. It is only when we do this that we show proper Thanksgiving and are truly living out the message of His Gospel.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta