

27/11/2023

## **Homily By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America On the Thirteenth Sunday of Saint Luke Saint Peter Greek Orthodox Church Bronx, New York**



My beloved Christians,

To stand with you today in prayer – especially in the aftermath of our National Feast of Thanksgiving – and to celebrate this Eucharist with you is a profound joy for me. For it is in the worship of the Church that we find our essential union with God and our unity with one another.

Our spiritual reality is deeper than the ethical codes we practice and teach our children. There is always something more that we are called to. Just like the rich young man who questioned the Lord in this morning's Gospel reading.

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? \*

This seems to be an innocent and sincere question, and there is no reason to challenge it. But the Lord does when he responds: "Why do you call Me good?"

This is quite the opposite of what we might expect, and certainly what the young man was waiting to hear. This is how the Lord responds to us—as individuals—so that He can make our lives greater and more complete. He throws the man off balance,

if you will, so that he can bring his life into harmony with God. Often, God does the same with us.

First, the Lord directed the man's mind to God: "No one is good but God alone." Think about this for a moment - the Lord Jesus Christ is God, but He points away from Himself for the sake of the man in front of Him. As Saint Paul observes:

Christ Jesus, Who, originally existing in the form of God, did not regard His equality with God as something to be grasped.†

Next, the Lord Jesus enumerates all of the Ten Commandments that have to do with our behavior toward others. Notice that he leaves out the duties toward God - like keeping the Sabbath. He stresses only those that affect our relationships with other human beings. And when the young man responds that he has observed all of these since his youth, we can see this answer two different ways.

First and very simply, the man was telling the truth. He may well have been a person of integrity and honesty. But there is an alternative. Perhaps, he made this claim to justify himself before Someone reputed to be a very holy Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. In either case, the Lord's response was to give him a challenge - one that called him to exceed himself, and become a greater man than he had ever been.

There is a Greek word for this - ἐπέκτασις. It means to extend beyond your reach, to exceed yourself and to keep progressing toward God throughout your life on earth and your future life in Heaven. Again, Saint Paul speaks of it this way:

... extending my reach — ἐπεκτεινόμενος - to that final destination which lies before me, I press on toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. ‡

This was the challenge of the Lord to the young man when He said to him:

"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." §

Remember, my friends, this was not a call for every person to do - this was tailored to the inner life and disposition of the young man. And we see his response - he became περίλυπος - very sad, even depressed - because he was very rich and could not imagine letting go of his wealth.

They say that when Saint Anthony the Great heard this same Gospel reading as a very rich young man during the Divine Liturgy, he got up at once and did what the other rich young man could not do. He sold everything that he had and embarked

on a life of following our Lord Jesus Christ, which led him to become one of the greatest monastic Saints the world has ever known!

You see, my beloved Christians, how the Lord uses each our of circumstances to perfect us, by giving us the opportunity to go beyond the ordinary – the usual, and reach out for the extraordinary.

Each of us, my friends, is known by God – in the deepest parts of our minds, our hearts and our souls. He will always challenge us to go beyond what we think we are capable of, to attain what He alone knows we can do.

We can love the unlovable.

We can forgive the unforgiveable.

We can move the very mountains with faith like a grain of mustard seed. Because, as the Lord said to His Disciples:

Τὰ ἀδύνατα παρὰ ἀνθρώποις δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ ἐστίν.

What is impossible with men is possible with God. \*\*

Amen!

\* Luke 18:18.

† Philippians 2:5b-6.

‡ Philippians 3:14.

§ Luke 18:22.

\*\* Luke 18:27.

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