



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel demonstrates a very important lesson to all who strive to be true Christians. Much like the Ruler who approaches Jesus, we too might think we are secure, or even full of pride when we come to Him in prayer.

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" a Ruler asks Him. (Luke 18:18) Understanding the man to be testing Him, Jesus corrects him—but mildly: *"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."* (Luke 18:19) He does indulge the Ruler, praising 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 have built our understanding on shaky foundations if, like the Ruler, we think to ourselves that this alone makes us perfect: *"I have kept all these since my youth."* (Luke 18:21) No, Jesus says to the proud, *"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, especially in a society as materialistic as ours, is often a sensitive one. "It is my money," some might say, "what right do others have to tell me what to do with it?" This is in fact, the perspective taken by the Ruler who after hearing Jesus, *"...became sad; for he was very rich."* (Luke 18:23) Jesus, however, 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, while true, 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)

Let us remember that Christ does not condemn money in itself; rather, He condemns the human pursuit of greed, which is the sin. When another wealthy man sees the error of his ways and promises to restore four-fold from those he defrauded, Christ greets Zacchaeus as a member of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Christ seeks out Levi, that is Matthew the tax collector, who gives up everything to follow Him. Christ condemns the Rich Fool—not for his wealth, but because the man believed his wealth protected him from death itself.

Like the other Rich Man, the one who failed to exhibit generosity and pity to Lazarus 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 of the Creator who blessed us with the means and talents to earn the money. As long as we seek to fulfill God's Will instead of our own, by *"distributing the money to the poor"*, then we are truly living out the message of His Gospel.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta