

Luke 18:18-27

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading a certain ruler asked the Lord, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

This question is perhaps the most important question in all of the Holy Scriptures. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

If we think about it, this is really the fundamental question of all of humanity, both personally and collectively. How can I, how can we, live in true happiness, total contentment, and forever and ever? How can we live in the best possible and most fulfilling way? And how can we live this way eternally?

To this question there are many answers, as man has struggled with this thought from the very beginning. Each religion and philosophy, from no matter from what race or nation, from no matter what era or century, has sought to answer this question in their own way.

And because their answers arose from the minds and hearts of men, according to their own limited knowledge and moral imperfections, their answers proved faulty and insufficient. Faulty because they could not make man truly happy and insufficient because they could not overcome death and give eternal life.

Yet, the answer which comes from God Himself is neither faulty nor insufficient, as it arises from His perfect knowledge, boundless love, and divine power – even over death itself.

The Lord responds to the ruler's question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life" with the words: "Keep the Commandments; do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother."

And the man responds saying, "I've kept these from my youth. What still do I lack?"

And the Lord says, "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me."

But as the Gospel records, when the man heard this saying he became very sorrowful for he had great possessions.

Brothers and sisters, this same dialogue is repeated countless times over and over in the heart of man. As men and women created in the image and likeness of God, it is programmed into us to seek eternal life: to seek that which is not only good, but the very best, to seek life with God, and to seek it eternally.

And whether we realize it consciously or not, with every moment of our life, we are asking the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “How can I make my life better, how can I live in the best possible way?”

To this question, as we have said, there are many answers. Some seek riches, as the man who planned to build bigger barns. Others seek pleasures: to experience all the “good things” of this world, all the things money can buy, as the prodigal son. Others seek glory and praise, to be highly esteemed, either through their worldly successes or even through their religious self-righteousness like the Pharisees.

But the Lord’s answer, and the only true answer to this question, is to deny oneself, take up one’s cross and follow Him.

How sharply does God’s answer conflict with the varied answers of the world? It’s like night and day. The world says true life is found in riches, pleasures, and glory. While the Lord says: don’t seek riches but sell all that you have and give to the poor; don’t seek pleasure but deny yourself for the Kingdom of God is neither eating nor drinking; and flee praise and glory but instead be humble for blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

With every passing moment of our lives, as we subconsciously ask ourselves the question, “What must I do to truly live?”, we are confronted with two opposing answers, one from the world and the other from God.

We know to whom we should listen, but at the same time, we often find ourselves living after the ways of the world according to the limited knowledge and moral imperfections of our ancestors, rather than the unerring path of Christ, Who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Yet, let us know be discouraged here, but instead let us investigate why we sometimes make the wrong decision, so that we can correct our ways.

The Fathers say that the primary reason why we follow the ways of the world rather than the ways of God, is not because we don’t desire what is better or best, over what is just good.

But because we usually only see what is best later in life, near the ending of our days, after having become not only accustomed to the good things of the world but even sometimes enslaved by them through years of habitual seeking, working for, and loving wealth, pleasure, and praise.

Then when we hear that Jesus Christ has come to give us not only life, but life more abundantly, when we hear that the Kingdom of God has been opened once again, when we hear that we are called to become joint heirs with Christ of His Heavenly Kingdom, we are sometimes slow to respond. Slow to respond because not only have we become

accustomed to worldly things, or perhaps even enslaved by them, but also because we are in a very practical way entangled in worldly living.

For instance, we may have worked so hard and for many years to grow our business, to prepare our nest-egg, that it would be difficult to walk away from what we have laid up to more fully follow Christ.

Or perhaps we have given ourselves over so much to pleasure seeking, to tasty foods, to drinking, smoking, drugs, or other additions, that even the thought of denying ourselves these things creates agitation at our very deepest level.

Or perhaps we have worked so hard to create a big name for ourselves, to be seen and acknowledged by our contemporaries, that the path of humility is just too difficult for us.

But brothers and sisters, this is exactly why the Lord said, "How hard is it for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven! For 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!"

And this is why, those who heard Christ's words 2,000 years ago, and perhaps some of us who heard them today, are wondering, "Who then can be saved!"

But let us not despair before hearing the Lord's answer, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!" That is the things which we cannot do on our own we can do through Christ.

In fact, this is the very reason why the Hebrew people looked to the coming of the Messiah, to the One who would save them from their sins, to the One who would release them from slavery to the ways of the world, to the One who would overcome the devil and grant life to those held captive by death.

This One is Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and He has come so that He might do in us, everything which we could not do by ourselves.

We mustn't think that the Lord came just simply to tear up the handwriting of our sins, or just simply to give us teaching about eternal life.

No, He came to do much more than this, He came to give each and every one of us all the help we need to take hold of eternal life ourselves by virtue of His dwelling within us.

He came to help us be in the world but not of the world. He came to set us free from the bonds of riches, pleasures, and pride. He came to help us die to corruptible life and live to incorruption.

That is, He came to help each of us work out our own salvation, not as a remote impersonal God up in heaven, but as an intimate companion walking each step of our life with us.

And so, as we continue to walk the path to the celebration of Christmas, to the feast of our Lord's Nativity according to the flesh, let us continue to ask the Lord Who dwells within us, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

How must I change my life so that I can not only more fully celebrate Your entrance into this world, but also so that I can more fully experience Your entrance into my heart, where You will accomplish all things necessary for my salvation, together with Your Eternal Father, and Your All-holy Good and Life-giving Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!