

# St Mary's Orthodox Church

Iron Mountain, MI

Sunday, November 27, 2011

## 24th Sunday after Pentecost

**TONE 7**

**Eothion 2**

**On this day, we commemorate:** Venerable Alypios the Stylite, Stylianos of Paphlagonia and Nikon the preacher of repentance; New-martyr George of Chios; repose of Innocent, first bishop of Irkutsk



## This week at St. Mary's

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Thursday, December 1st

Vespers 5:30pm

Adult Education to follow ~6pm

**\*\*On the Incarnation\*\* "Why Christmas Matters"**

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Saturday, December 3rd

Great Vespers

Confession to follow

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Sunday, December 4th

Matins 9am

Divine Liturgy 10am

*Fast days this next week*

All week *Notice: Advent fast*



### Epistle

Ephesians 2:14 to the end

(24th Sunday after Pentecost)

BRETHREN, Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the diving wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

# Gospel

Luke 18:18-27 (13th Sunday of Luke)



At that time, a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth."

And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich.

Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 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." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

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## To Our Visitors Concerning Holy Communion

**St Mary's Orthodox Church** is a parish of the [Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America](#), The Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East- "The Disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:26)

We welcome you to worship this morning and thank you for joining us. Unfortunately, one of the sad consequences of the division among Christians is that we cannot offer the Eucharist (Holy Communion) to anyone except **Orthodox Christians in good moral standing with the beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Church.** This includes preparatory prayers, fasting, and the sacrament of Holy Confession.

Orthodox Christians believe that the Holy Eucharist is a final sign of unity among all Christians and not a means by which unity is achieved.

We invite you to share in the Blessed Bread that is distributed after Communion and at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. This Bread represents the Bread of Fellowship.

## *What shall I do.....*

**The scripture begins: "And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"**

This is a good question, as it appears, but actually in the case of this man, it was not a good question, because our Lord knew his actual desire was to test the Lord. St. Cyril of Jerusalem talks about this in his homilies. He was really trying to trip Jesus up, and get him to say something contrary to the law.

A better question would not really be a question at all, but a prayer, a yearning, a desire. Our prayers are full of this quality. All the prayers of the Saints have this quality to them - beseeching the Lord to enlighten us, and fill us. It is not so much 'What do I have to do to be saved', as if there is a checklist of things, but instead, an ardent desire to please the Lord in all things. That's what our life should be. So our entire existence, every breath we take, should be a PLEA to our Lord and Savior, that He would enlighten us, to be able to do good works for His glory and to be pleasing to Him. In doing good things, we are becoming like Him, which is our goal, which is the process of our life.

A question like this is really a very shallow question. The answer, though, is very simple, but profound. We know the answer. We follow Christ. Where Christ is, there is all blessedness, and we learn to be like Him. We learn how He thinks, and we learn to think like Him (and by the way, the church is His body, and the way the church thinks is the way He thinks).

Another aspect of Christ that this question does not bring into account at all is that Jesus Christ is a great healer! He is the Great Physician. To be near Him is to be near warmth, actually to be near *fire*, and to be enlightened, and to be made ABLE to do good works. It's not just a matter of questioning what should I do. It's, ... O Lord, help to DO that which I should do.

Jesus knew the character of this man, and He knows that He's rich, and He is first going to test him a little bit, to the end that He shows how silly his question was.

**"And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God."** This is merely a rebuke of the ruler. His essence is saying, 'Do you KNOW Whom you

are talking to? You are talking to the uncreated One. You are talking to the God-man, Jesus Christ. Moses had to hide in the cleft of a rock for Me to pass by, because He could not endure my sight. , and you talk to me as if I am a common man'. Then He answers the ruler some more, in a way that must have seemed to the man to have been insulting:

**"Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother."** These are "givens" aren't they? He gives him the law by the way, so that this man can have nothing to say against him. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He had enemies, mortal enemies, and they were trying to kill Him for the entire three years, but Christ picked the time and the place in which He was to be executed. It was His choice when He went to His cross, and this was not His time yet. So, He avoids the possibility of censure by saying to follow the commandments, to follow the law. No good Jew would be able to disagree with Him, but He is also making another point here, and later on He tells the man what he really should do.

Following the law is merely the bedrock upon which the virtues begin. They are just in a fledgling state, if we can follow these things, The really high virtues of the soul are much more profound than not committing adultery. They are not having any thing unclean at all in our hearts! They are much more profound than not stealing. They are to have love for another man to such an extent that we would be willing to die for him, or we would be willing to prostrate and prayer with tears for him, as so many of the holy fathers did. The Christian life is well above these commandments. These commandments are minimums. They are just the beginning, and the law cannot save - becoming like Christ, though His grace - that's what saves.

Now if we take the law and these commandments, and we extend them to our life in the church, we can say, 'thou knowest what thou shouldest do': accept the church's teaching, accept the church's authority in your life (which is a big stumbling block for so many people). Come to the services! This seems to be a given. Come to all the services. I will say this until I have no more breath - in today's climate, with it's incredible temptations, if you are not coming to all the services offered, you are endangering your soul.

And I believe, and the church teaches that it is a sin, if you are able to come to church, and you don't want to give due service to God. It's a sin, and you are cheating yourself. You struggle with your passions; that's another given. You keep the fasts. This is just the beginning of virtue now, just the foundation. We say our prayers in the morning and the evening. I have counseled everybody, I think that, to pray together, if you are husband and wife, to pray together at night. It is absolutely critical to do so. Read holy things together as a family with your children or with each other, and say prayers together at night to edify one-another. Confess frequently, commune frequently, prepare yourself for the body and blood with fear and trembling. Now, that's all the beginning. The rich ruler was too **overconfident in his own virtue**, and said: **"All these have I kept from my youth up."** [6]

In his case, he didn't know Who he was talking to., He didn't know that the God-man could see right through him. He didn't keep all these commandments from his youth up! Which one of us, would say, even among the small list mentioned here (and remember, there are many more), that we have never participated in even one of them? No man lives and sins not. [7]

So this man is full of pride and vanity, and cannot see himself. He just sees externally. I never committed adultery, I have not stolen, I have not killed anybody. I'm a pretty good person. I'm a good Jew. He is not even close, because he has missed the *essence* of the law. I tell you, it was there, albeit in shadows and darkness, it was there even before Christ. Many of the Saints in Old Testament times became exalted in virtue. Joseph the All-Comely, David, the prophet and King, Elias. It was still possible for a man, even then, before the full light of Christ had shone, to understand the depth of the law, that is was much more than just a few commandments. But now more so we have the writings of the fathers, the beautiful services, we have the whole witness of this incredible choir of Saints for the past two thousand years - even more so for us, we should know that just keeping a few commandments is not the Christian life.

**"Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."** [8]

As is usual in the Gospel, there is more than one meaning here. Externally, Christ knows that the man is rich, and is speaking to his particular vice, his greed. The internal meaning here, that we must grasp, is that the real Christian's life is EVERYTHING. God said 'Give me your heart' [9]. He want all of us. Christianity is not some list of rules that we should follow, that we should check off, that limits our responsibility, as if we only have to do so much. Even if the rules are lofty, we may erringly think we only have to do so much., That is why I have never told anyone that we should tithe, that you must give ten percent. I don't think ten percent is enough! According to the early church it isn't. There is no percentage of your funds that you should necessarily allocate to the church - it's all God's money.

Christianity is higher than mere laws. It is life. Christianity is the breathing of the Holy Spirit, and Christ is showing to this man the TOTALITY of the Christian commitment . *"Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."* [10] Completely live in and imbibe the sweetness of Christ every moment of your life. And if you are doing that, you wouldn't be asking a question like 'what should I do to be saved'. You would be too busy struggling against your passions, saying Lord have mercy on me!, feeling compassion for your brethren, weeping over the predicaments of someone else, and asking God to help that person, even if, perchance, it would mean your own damnation. You would be too busy with those things. The church has already told us what we need to do to be saved. We need to be everything in Christ. We need to become perfect.

**"And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."** [11]

A camel, in this context, is a thick cable, as used on a ship, and the eye of a needle is a part of something on the ship that the camel must be threaded through. This is very difficult to do, but it is not impossible for the rich to be saved. Christ isn't saying this. What about St. Philaret the merciful (we just read about him yesterday). He was very rich, and yet, his face shone like the sun when he re-

posed. The prophet David was rich, the Patriarch Abraham was rich, incalculably rich, the Tsar Martyr Nicholas ... many saints have been very rich. It's not money that damns a man. Here, our Lord is not only exposing the weakness of the ruler, but also comparing rich to being distracted. Being rich in money, but poor in virtue and the knowledge of the Holy is what He is railing against here. We must be rich toward God. Remember the parable of the harvest of the rich man? [12] He was not rich towards God, and his soul was taken from him, and he was forgotten and buried.

**"And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." [13]**

It's difficult to be saved, and we ask this question sometimes. I've asked it, and I daresay, everyone in this room has asked this question - "How can I be saved?". Sometimes we ask because of humility, although also with lack of faith, and one should never ask this question without warm faith in the mercy of God. We ask the question of ourselves, how can I stop doing these things that I am having so much trouble with. God help me! I can't stop! God will help you though. You just need to increase your faith, and God will bring you through the storm.

Other times, we ask this question, not because of a religious reason, but because we want to keep doing those things we want to do. And we ask the question, wanting to hold onto our sins. Well, the answer is easy. Stop doing what you are doing. Stop sinning. Give up these sins. The rich ruler did not want to give up his sins, so he went away sorrowful, very sorrowful. He encountered the God-man, and he missed Him, he lost Him.

God help us to be truly rich in Christ, and to know the answer to the question in our hearts - not like something we can write on a piece of paper, as in an exam, but to know the answer to the question - what should I do to inherit eternal life. It's easy, very easy. Take the yoke of the sweet Savior upon yourself, and live for Him,. And in him, and He will help you.

Amen.

Bibliography:

"Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke",  
St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria