



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

### PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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#### THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

**EPISTLE** The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians [2:4-10] But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

**EXPLANATION:** Here we have a revelation of the inner heart of Our God. Despite our wretchedness, our inner coldness which rebels against His love, God still loves us. We may have been sinners living according to the passions of the flesh, **“But God”, Who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us**, even when we were spiritually dead through sin, made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places. He rules by mercy and love. The beginning of His rule is redemption to eternal life. We had no way to escape the bondage of the devil or to rise out of spiritual death into the life of God; but God had. No matter how sinful we are, how unworthy or inferior we consider ourselves, God’s forgiving love can hardly wait to bestow upon the penitent sinner the immeasurable riches of His grace. The “wages of sin is death”, but God’s mercy

is greater than any sin. He is rich in mercy, fabulously overflowing with compassion. Here we see the generosity of our God, the boundless burning love He has for us. Though we were dead to Him, He saved us by grace so that in the eternal ages to come He might further show the supposing riches of His grace in kindness towards us. **(2:4-7)** Though our salvation is of course the result of our **“faith”** – our repentant response to God and our discipleship to Jesus, it is not our own heroic accomplishment. Our rescue is not of **“yourselves”** – not the result of any inner triumph, not the manifestation of any goodness found in ourselves. St Paul declares that we are saved by **“grace”**, as the undeserved gift of God. We emerge from our baptismal initiation as the blameless sons of God, united to Christ, sharing His glory – all this despite our not having done any great feat worthy of blessing. Rather, we approached the font as condemned sinners, **“by nature children of wrath”**, yet we emerged as united to Christ, seated in the heavenlies, for above all rule, authority, power and dominion. **(2:8)** Thus, we have no grounds to **“boast”**, exalting ourselves one over the other, puffing ourselves up in the presence of God. Humility, the foundation of all Orthodox spirituality, is thus built into our Faith, as flowing from the baptismal experience itself. For from being self-made, we are the **“workmanship”** and handiwork of God. He has recreated us as His new creation in Christ Jesus. He fashioned us afresh, making us anew. And no man can take credit for his own creation, so none of us can boast of our new life, status or glory. It is entirely the work of God. God created us, not for our own pleasure, not to pursue our own ends and destinies, but to glorify Him. **(2:9-10)** That is, **“for good works”**. Not that good works are inseparable from the Christian life, and no one can be saved without them. Not, however, that the good works are the ground and cause of our salvation – for St Paul has just said that **our salvation “is not works”**. But rather, good works are what the Christian life is all about. God has prearranged that **“we should walk in them”**. This means that before this age, from all eternity, God had planned that we should be resplendent with the light of kindness and love – that His people should be **“conformed to the image of His Son”** – being like Him, **“holy and blameless”** and to be **“shining as lights in the world”** now. Good works flow out of authentic faith. Those who receive grace through faith also do good works. We are not saved by good works, but for good works. **“Good works without faith is dead”**, writes St James, just as

faith without good works is dead. Thus, the Christian activity cultivates a habit of doing good works for the glory of God, as a way of life and not just doing good works to earn 'browny points' with God in Heaven.

**GOSPEL** **The Reading is from St Luke** [16:19-31] **There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who laid at his gate, desiring to be fed from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us." Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment." Abraham said to him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." But he said to them, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead."**

**EXPLANATION:** In this Parable, the beggar is named. The rich man is not. God knows those poor outcasts who patiently endure hardship, but the rich who are known and highly esteemed by other people for their wealth and power, the Lord says, "I never knew you" (Matt 7:23); "Neither will I make mention of their name." (Ps 15/16:4) What was the rich man's sin? Not that he was rich. His sin was lovelessness. He saw Lazarus often, perhaps every day, yet ignored him. God placed him at the rich man's doorstep deliberately in order to save the rich man. But he lacked love and compassion. He saw him in hunger, in suffering, yet did nothing to help him. Even the dogs were more merciful. They licked his sores. His sin was his failure to show mercy on the beggar and to use his wealth for no one but himself. But it wasn't just Lazarus whom the rich man ignored. It was also Christ Who identifies Himself with every suffering Lazarus, "I was hungry

and you fed me not.” One of the great dangers of affluence is its enormous power to distract us from the love of God and love of neighbour. It tends to harden human hearts against the needs of others. It stands up self-righteously and literally condemns the poor and homeless. Wealth and goods do not belong to us. God loans them to us so that we may have enough to distribute to the poor and needy. We are responsible to Him for all we have. Poverty is not of itself righteousness, but patient endurance and acceptance of God’s will without complaint. This is what carried Lazarus’s soul by angels to **Abraham’s bosom** (heaven). Although the rich man did not notice Lazarus during his lifetime, he now asks for help from the very one he ignored. But death is the great turning point in this parable. Jesus shocks his bearers by claiming that after condemnation or judgment no help can be expected from the righteous. If the rich man had shown some sign of repentance or had tried to do something to rectify a lifetime of selfishness before it was too late, this beggar could have interceded for him as the time of his death drew near. He had not made a friend of the **“mammon of unrighteousness”**, that is, he failed to use his wealth to minister to one of its victims. Now a **“great gulf”** separates them. That is, God has fixed a great chasm between sinners and the righteous which no one can cross. It is impossible to go from the place of punishment to the place of the righteous. God has placed the two states in close proximity so sinners might see their loss for choosing to separate themselves from God. In this parable we see that death does not destroy consciousness, nor identity, nor change of personality, nor memory, nor destiny. All are carried through into the afterlife and into eternity. There are many poor people in hell, just as there are many rich people in heaven. We will see loved ones wherever we are placed but we will not be able to help them. The pain of seeing one’s loved ones tormented in hell would be so unbearable that it would make paradise hell. However, what is impossible for man is not impossible for God. It is possible for the burning love that a righteous person has for God to overcome in Paradise all earthly sorrow as we know it. Also our prayers and memorial services for the dead are an important invocation