



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2019 – RICHES OF ETERNAL LIFE

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, far 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 [18:18-27] Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is God. You know the commandment, ‘Do not commit adultery’, ‘Do not murder’, ‘Do not steal’, ‘Do not bear false witness’, ‘Honour your father and mother’.*” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “*You still lack one thing. 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 very sorrowful, for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He 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.” And those who heard it said, “Who then can be saved?” But He said, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*”

EXPLANATION: The rich young man is a lover of money, and he approaches Jesus eager to learn how he, along with his wealth, might inherit eternal life. He thought that Jesus could show him some way in which he could live forever enjoying his material possessions. But when the Lord told him that non-possession is what bestows eternal life he went away sorrowful. Although he boasted that he kept all the Commandments, Jesus reminded him of the First Commandment of God – “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.” The young ruler worshipped the “God of Mammon” – the god of money. Only this “**one thing**” stood in the way of his reach for the kingdom, but that “one thing” was enough to make him lose it. Jesus was not condemning all possessions. There is no record that Jesus ever told Martha and Mary to sell their home in Bethany. Jesus saw that this young man had allowed his possessions to come between him and God. Therefore, as a Good Physician, He

prescribed the appropriate remedy – **“Go and sell all that you have and come follow Me.”** That is, if your possessions cause you to sin, then no matter how painful, cut them off. But he was held fast by the love of money, a passion that was stronger than his love for eternal life. Jesus extended the same invitation to the rich young man as He did to the Apostles – **“Come follow Me”**. If he had followed Jesus, we would be honouring his memory today as an apostle, but as it is, we don’t even know his name. This one thing that he still lacked was that he placed his love of possessions above his love for God. He believed that God belonged in the synagogue and had no business in the world of finance. The same applies in our lives today. We try and departmentalize God by saying that we shouldn’t mix religion with politics or business – each belongs in its own realm. But God knocks on every door of our life. If we keep all doors open to Him he will come in and give us Himself, Salvation, everything. Jesus did not say that it would be impossible for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven, but that it would be difficult. That is, it is difficult for a rich man to part with his possessions and be saved. So much so that it becomes almost impossible. However, a rich man who keeps riches for himself is different to a steward who, as a trustee, holds wealth for the benefit of others. What Jesus is therefore saying is that “the rich man who is possessed by riches and is a slave to them and is held fast by them, and has no time for God, shall not be saved. But he who has riches, that is, who is master of riches, owning them without being owned by them, shall be saved with difficulty? That difficulty is because of human weakness. For it is impossible for us not to misuse what we have. Only with great difficulty do we escape the devil’s traps. But with God’s help, it is possible to be saved. If we use our wealth to help those in need we will be saved by those “friends” who will intercede for us for God’s mercy. Thus the impossible becomes possible. This rule also applies to the poor. Though his belongings are few, man’s attachment to his possessions is even greater when he owns little. And if it is the case that a poor man is attached to his possessions to the same degree as a rich man, then, at a minimum, the loss of the kingdom is the same for each. But those who have given up everything for the sake of the kingdom will receive not only tangible rewards in the life to come but eternal life.