

**The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Mark 10:17-22**

*Sell whatever you have and give to the poor* our Lord Jesus said to the rich young man, *then you will have treasure in Heaven.* And the rich young man *went away sorrowful,* Holy Scripture says, *for he had great possessions.*

Now, I do not see any of you getting up from your pews to walk away sorrowful. But then, when people walk away from Church, it is usually not because they are *sorrowful* to find themselves unable to measure up to what God demands of them, but rather because they are *indignant* that Holy Scripture says something they do not agree with, and that somebody has been so insolent as to tell them that it does, and perhaps even to imply that what Holy Scripture says is what *goes,* because God is God, and they are not.

And still I do not see any of you getting up from your pews to walk away; but then, the day is yet young, is it not?

Well, it might not really make you all that *sorrowful* to hear what our Lord Jesus said to the rich young man: *Sell whatever you have and give to the poor, then you will have treasure in Heaven.* I suppose it might make some of you somewhat *uncomfortable,* perhaps, although not *too* much, for you know only *too* well that this is not *for real.* We know that way too well, do we not, that nobody actually expects us to sell all we have to give to the poor. Perhaps we know only *too* well, because we have learnt from our life in Church that nobody *really* expects us to follow the Word and will of God. Perhaps we have learnt that we do not really have to follow the Word and will of God, for He really is not real; well, I certainly hope that none of us here believes that, for to believe that is to *not* be Christian. Or perhaps we have learnt that Holy Scripture is not really the Word of God, and that it is not from there we shall learn what is His will, and what is good and right. I hope that none of us here believes that either, though, for it is not what our church believes, and if the faith of this church is not what you believe, well, then you do not belong here, and you definitely should not take the Sacrament here, for that is to lie to the rest of us and force your ungodliness upon us, which is not a nice thing to do, or loving, and it is also to challenge God which is *dangerous* thing to do, placing your salvation in jeopardy. As the holy Apostle Paul writes it: *anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself.*

It might be that you just know already that Holy Scripture does not command you to sell all that you have to give to the poor, although that is what our Lord Jesus told the rich young man to do. And it actually is not; although God does command you, in Holy Scripture, to give *something* to the poor. He does; but He also commands you to care and provide for those He has entrusted it to you to care and provide for. *If anyone does not provide for his own, the holy Apostle Paul also writes, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* So there is that.

It might also be that you know already that it is not by your own goodness and godliness and good works that you have a treasure in Heaven, but only on account of the forgiveness of sins our Lord Jesus has won for all sinners with His pure and perfect life and with His innocent sufferings and death. And that is indeed true, and nothing should be spoken against that, not ever; although, again, this does not mean that you are free to disregard His Word and will in the way you actually live and believe and behave, not at all.

It is indeed true that God does not command you to sell all that you have to give to the poor. But you might want to ponder this question: Would it make any difference to you if He did?

Clearly, what we hear today that our Lord Jesus said to the rich young man whom He looked upon and loved, was spoken specifically to *him*, and as such it is not spoken to everybody, not even to all Christians: *One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me.*

Actually, it is very likely that the rich young man of whom the Gospel according to Saint Mark tells us, although the Gospel according to Saint does not tell us that he was young, is Saint Mark himself. He would later be called into the ministry, and find it to be an excruciating endeavour exactly because of the high standard of living to which he was accustomed.

Be that as it may: what we hear today gives us all cause to consider, each for oneself: Is there something in my life that I *will* not give up, something that is more important to me than the faith and the obedience I owe to God, something that stands between me and Him and keeps me from serving Him as I owe it to Him, some deliberate disobedience by which I bring my faith in jeopardy, and my salvation? For yes, deliberate disobedience to the Word and will of God will do that, will jeopardise your faith, and so also ultimately your salvation.

*No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, writes the holy Apostle John, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. Those in whom the love of God lives and works, by His Word of His love and what His love has done for us, cannot live comfortably in sin; the love of God will not allow us to. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, John also writes, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? When we will not submit to the will of God, as we know His will from His Word, and refuse outright to take His Word seriously so as to honour and obey it, we shut our hearts to His love, and His love will die in us, and with it, the faith.*

Many things can make us to shut our hearts to the Word and will of God and not take it to heart; sinful ways of life in which we indulge ourselves, knowing that it is not right for me to do this, and teaching ourselves not to care; habits or hobbies that keep us from coming to Church in the first place to hear the Word of God and have His love live in us; false beliefs that are precious to us because we were raised to hold them, or because we feel good watching the false teachers who teach them on television, or reading their books, or because somebody we care about holds to these false beliefs.

And as we allow ourselves to become accustomed to disregarding the Word of God, we teach ourselves not to take the Word of God seriously, nor God Himself. We train ourselves to *not* believe in God! And ultimately, we will fall away from the faith and from our salvation and fall again under judgement and damnation with God. *For if we go on sinning deliberately, writes the Letter to the Hebrews, after having received the knowledge of the Truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.* So serious is it; not because God will run out of patience, nor because our sins become too many or too great to be covered by His mercy, but rather because we make ourselves unable to hear His Word of *salvation* as real, and believe it.

Clearly, what we hear today that our Lord Jesus said to the rich young man whom He looked upon, and loved, was spoken specifically to him: *One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven.*

However, what He also said to the rich young man applies to us all: *Come, take up the cross, and follow me.* His Word of His love and what His love has done for us calls us all and draws us all into a new and different life in His love.

It draws us into a life in which we live under the Word and worship of His love, and live out His love in the way we live and behave; for in His Word of His love, His love itself comes to us, with His Holy Spirit, and lives in us, as we hear His Word, and take it to heart.

His Word of His goodness also calls us into a lifelong struggle against evil; not the evil of others, so much, but evil in *ourselves*, ungodliness and impurity and unbelief. And a painful struggle that is, against ourselves; a necessary struggle it is, nevertheless, and one well worth it: it leads to *holiness and eternal life*, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it; not to mention that to fight the good fight is the right thing to do, and what we owe to God.

*For to this you have been called*, writes the holy Apostle Peter, *because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you might follow in His steps*. Now, this the Apostle writes specifically about enduring injustice, and more specifically, about slaves and servants enduring injustice from unfair masters; but it really applies to all of the struggle that is the Christian life.

And the Apostle continues by expounding on the example Christ has left us: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten. Rather, He continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly*. So the example our Lord Jesus has set for us is not only an example of *patience*, but also, and first and foremost, an example of *faith*, of trusting in God to do right and to ultimately make all things well. And from this, the Apostle goes on to present *the Gospel*, the Word of salvation by which the faith comes alive in us and lives in us, when we hear it and take it to heart: *He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed*. With His sufferings and death all our sins and shortcomings are dealt with and done away with, and so we are free from all sin and guilt, right with Him and righteous before His judgement, and heirs with Him to His Kingdom and His eternal life. And that makes it all well worth it. And although the struggle against sin remains a losing battle all through your life, to continue to fight this losing battle is to have won it already. Yes. *For we have come to share in Christ*, as the Letter to the Hebrews writes it, *if we hold our original confidence firm to the end*.

Now, to Him, whose power works in us and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, be glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.