

On Discovering God's Strength in our Weaknesses

Sunday, October 23, 2022



11Readings:

2 Corinthians 11:31-12:9 (Epistle)

Luke 16:19-31 (Gospel)

Good morning:

Yesterday's goal was the exploration of a common theme between the Epistle and Gospel:

How is it – as St. Paul discovered and shared in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians – that God expresses His grace through our weaknesses:

And He [the Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Cor. 12:9).

In his parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31, Jesus showed how what might have seemed like the rich man's strengths, his wealth, were in fact both the source of his condemnation, and his weakness.

But perhaps while not minimizing the need to provide specific care for the needy, there may be other ways of perceiving what are our strengths and what we can or do not do with them may be perceived as our own weaknesses.

Several passages from Fr. Alexander Elchaninov were presented to develop this point:

“How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:24). It is not only material riches that prevent us from entering the kingdom of God; a still greater obstacle are the higher endowments of the mind – talents, special abilities, will-power. How difficult not to be carried away by all these, not to fall into vanity and pride.

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The normal order within the soul:

- 1) A mysterious inner life of the spirit of which we are unaware, the genuine pledge of our salvation – given to us through Holy Baptism, through the sacraments, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) The mist of our pseudo-virtues, disfigured and corroded by the acid of vainglory: our so-called good deeds, our so-called prayer, truthfulness, and honesty. This mist obscures the true and pathetic picture of our soul and hinders our contrition.
- 3) The clouds of our actual sins which we do not remember, which we easily forgive ourselves: our continual censure of other people, mockery, contempt, indifference, coldness, anger.
- 4) Lastly, beneath all this, the deep, ancient strata of hereditary corruption which we share with the whole of humanity – the fundamental sins from which arise, like poisonous vapors, blasphemous thoughts and impulses, all kinds of impurities, monstrous perversions... (“*The Diary of a Russian Priest*,” pp. 38-39).

Fr. Alexander reminds us that the place to begin our “mysterious inner life” is the awareness and limitations of these “so-called” efforts and weaknesses.

CONCLUSION:

At the end of today’s Gospel, the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers, who are still alive on the earth, to warn them of the future consequences if they don’t change their ways:

Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’

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And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’

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But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

The reference to Moses is important for not only does he represent the Old Testament Scriptures attributed to him, but he is one to whom God spoke "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). In Jesus' parable of the Last Judgment He will remind us that what is done or not done to the least of our brothers and sisters is done or not done to Him (Mt 25:40).

When we recognize as St. Paul did his weaknesses, we have a place for the "strength and power of Christ" to rest within us as well.