



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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Enslavement To Our Passions
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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I know many people who I would call “good people.” I have coworkers who I trust will help me when I ask them. I have come across people in my life who are kind to everyone they meet. I know people who give to charities and care about others. But what does it mean to truly be a good person?

In today’s gospel lesson from Luke, a rich ruler came to Christ asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. When Christ asked him if he had kept the commandments, he stated that he had. He was by all accounts what one would consider a good man. His wealth would have been viewed by others as God’s blessing upon him. And yet, this ruler still felt unfulfilled. In the Gospel according to Mark, it states that this rich ruler came running to Christ and knelt before Him. In Mark, you hear the near despair that the rich man felt. He desperately wanted to inherit eternal life, and he inwardly knew that keeping the commandments wasn’t enough.

The rich ruler referred to Christ as a “good teacher.” And this is when true goodness is revealed to us. Christ responded by saying “No one is good but One, that is, God.” To be truly good isn’t to keep the commandments such as to not commit murder, honor your parents, or any other commandment; to be good is to be God-like, to have God dwelling within us. Seeking to acquire goodness without seeking God is like seeking after a shadow, a phantom that can never be grasped. Being good according to the world doesn’t grant us the inheritance of eternal life; God does. It is our Christlikeness, our union with God, that inherits us eternal life. This is what makes us truly “good.”

When the ruler stated that he had kept the commandments from his youth, Christ points out one thing the ruler lacked, instructing the ruler to sell all he had, give to the poor, and follow Him. What was it that the rich ruler lacked? It was freedom in Christ. He was so attached to His riches that he was willing to walk away from Christ, the salvation of the world, in order to remain enslaved to the passion that had possessed him: greed. What a blessing it could have been for others, as well as for the man, if he had distributed his riches to those in need? How terrible it is that the rich ruler was sincere in his desire to have eternal life in God, knowing that there was something missing in his life, and yet to go away sorrowful. But that’s where enslavement to our passions leads us, away from God and in sorrow.

Some of us may shut our ears at today’s gospel as we may not be rich, or we may use this gospel as a reason to shake our heads at the rich. But how many of us have other passions which we are enslaved to? Perhaps it is greed, envy, lust, anger, or any other number of sins. Christ has revealed what we must do to inherit eternal life: we must deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him. We cannot have Christ and the world; we must choose one or the other.

Don’t be enslaved to the passions which lead us away from God and in sorrow! You have been united to God in your baptism. If you are enslaved to sin, pray to God to help take these passions away from you. Keep the fasts of the Church. We have these fasts for a reason. Fasting is not something sacrificial. Fasting is a discipline where we gain control of our food, so that the desire for food doesn’t control us. It’s about reigning in our passions, wants, and desires so that we are not enslaved to them.

The rich ruler turned away from God in sorrow, remaining enslaved to the passion which possessed him. Let us turn to God in gladness, leaving behind the passions which had enslaved us.

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