

## **Bible Study Dec. 9, 2015**

### **Luke 18:15-17, 26-30**

*“15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. 26 And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? 27 And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. 28 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. 29 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, 30 Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.”*

There are four main issues that are presented here:

1. Our Christian responsibility as Christ's disciples toward children
2. The virtues that children embody which we must have in order to enter the kingdom of God
3. How we cannot accomplish Christ's commandments only through our limited human means, but God's help is necessary
4. The reward of renunciation

### **Our Christian responsibility as Christ's disciples toward children**

Archbishop Averky says that the Lord must have a very great love for children if He Who meekly and patiently endured much human falseness was so angered at His disciples for rebuking the children who wanted to come to Him...The Lord explains His love for children by indicating their worthiness...In other words, one must receive the kingdom of God in one's heart with the same kind of pure, innocent and incorrupt spiritual disposition that children have before they have been corrupted by sin...Here we can safely infer that those parents and role models who do not lead children to Christ and do not teach them the Christian faith are committing a great sin. An even greater sin lies upon those who purposely push children away from the path of faith.

### **The virtues that children embody which we must have in order to enter the kingdom of God**

St. Theophylact says “A little child is not haughty, he does not despise anyone, he is innocent and guileless. He does not inflate himself in the presence of important people, nor withdraw from those in sorrows. Instead he lives in complete simplicity. So it is that he who lives humbly and innocently will be accepted by God, as well as he who receives the kingdom of God the way a little child does, without guile or skepticism... Therefore, not with skepticism but with faith and humility, let us accept everything that pertains to the Church, which is the kingdom of God. For skepticism comes from presumption and self-conceit, and from glorifying mere intelligence.”

St. Ambrose of Milan writes: “And why does He say that children are fit for the Kingdom of Heaven? Perhaps because they do not know malice, they have not learned to deceive they are not strike back, they neglect to search for wealth they do not strive after honour and ambition. But virtue is not to be ignorant of those things, but to despise them, nor is there praise of abstinence where there is integrity through weakness. For not childhood, but goodness rivalling childlike simplicity is meant. For it is not a virtue to be unable to sin, but to be unwilling so to do...”

**Who then can be saved? With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**

Today's Gospel reading leaves out Luke 18:18-25 which is the account of the Rich Young Man who asked Christ what he should do to inherit eternal life. When the Lord tells him to sell all that he has, give to the poor and follow Him, the Rich Young Man turns away in sorrow because he was attached to his wealth and unable to part with it. It is then that the Disciples ask the Lord "who then can be saved" and the Lord answers that with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Here we see an image of our fallen nature and the fallen world in which we live. It is because of the Fall from Paradise of our ancestors Adam and Eve, that Christ became Incarnate as a man, submitted to suffering and death on the Cross descended into hell, saved mankind by destroying the gates of hell and offering the promise of eternal life and resurrection for all who would follow Him and believe in Him. This fallen nature of ours is sometimes hidden from view. We may tend to grow accustomed to things being a certain way and our view can be distorted until we come in contact with the Gospel and with Christ. It's almost as though a person was afflicted with partial blindness and was unable to see clearly and yet rather than acknowledge that, they continue to act as though they can see perfectly. Yet this is an illusion and the person might try to drive their car and get into an accident and be quite shocked to hear someone else tell them how blind they really are.

Fr. Michael Pomazansky (in *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*) writes: "...with the first transgression of the commandment, the principle of sin immediately entered into man—"the law of sin." It struck the very nature of man and quickly began to root itself in him and develop. Of this sinful principle which entered human nature, the Apostle Paul wrote: *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not...For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members...*(Rom. 7:18. 22-23)"

St. Theophylact says, "With men who have merely a human outlook, that is, those who desire earthly things and are pulled downwards, it is impossible for them to be saved...But with God it is possible. That is to say, with God's help, when a man has God as his Counsellor, and takes as his teachers the judgments of God and His commandments concerning non-possession, and calls upon God for help, then it is possible to be saved."

### **The Reward of Renunciation**

Christ said I Luke 9:2, "...If any *man* will come after me, let him **deny** himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. This 'self-denial' has long been understood in the Scriptures and writings of the Holy Fathers as the first step toward our salvation. For example, in the monastic life when a person wants to join a monastery, the first commitment they must make is obedience to the Abbott or Abbess of the monastery. At our Baptism, we give ourselves to Christ and agree to be obedient to all His commandments. This is what makes a person a real Christian, when they are actually living their life according to this principle. Our self-will must be sacrificed for the sake of Christ. Even husbands and wives must sacrifice their own separate, individual will or there will be a lot of trouble in the marriage. Parents must sacrifice for the sake of their children, or the children will suffer greatly.

Yet, God loves us and promises us a reward that if we give up worldly things and give the highest priority to heavenly things, even if it means our own family and friends—particularly those who do not share our faith—then we will find fulfillment in the life to come and also in this life. It is quite common for Christians to find a much deeper love and spiritual family with one another in the Church than even their own earthly family sometimes.

This denial of our lower nature, then helps us be less attached to the things of the world. Just like a hot air balloon must disconnect from the mooring rope in order to ascend into the sky, so we must set aside all worldly cares as we sing at the Divine Liturgy during the Cherubic Hymn.