

Many people in our society define themselves according to what they possess, and center their lives on *things*, such as eating, shopping, entertainment, and the latest fashion trends. Their motto in life might as well be that of the parable of the rich man: “Relax! Eat heartily, drink well. Enjoy yourself”. This seems to echo something from the book of the Prophet Isaiah. There, the Lord warns the inhabitants of Jerusalem to repent of their sins else they would face an invasion and impending doom. They did not repent, but said to one another, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die (Isa 22:14).

Those who have immersed themselves in this world, either turn a blind eye to the fact that this life, and everything in it, is passing way, or else they give themselves over to despair, as the inhabitants of Jerusalem did. In either case,

they have given their lives to that which is fleeting, to mere shadows.

They are like the rich man in the parable, who was living in a dreamworld, trusting in his possessions, and fantasizing a long life in the enjoyment of them. He was deluding himself into thinking that all of this wealth was actually *his*. Can any of us say that something is truly ours, that we truly possess it, if it can be so easily taken away from us?

Suppose that the owner of a magnificent mansion, with beautiful gardens, and many servants, allowed us to live there. We have free reign, the use of everything, and the servants wait on us. Suppose that this is our situation for years on end. Would you say that we possess any of this? No, because of the fact that this mansion, and all that it contains, can be easily taken away from us. We may enjoy the mansion,

the gardens, and the servants who wait on us, but none of this is ours, because we do not truly *possess* it. So, the things that we typically think of as *belonging* to us, as our *possessions*, are only on loan to us, for a time, maybe a very *short* time.

The man in the parable thought that he possessed great wealth. And he took great comfort in this, but it was an illusion. He also believed that he possessed his own life, such that he had years ahead of him. So, the rich man says, “I will say to myself, ‘You have blessings in reserve for years to come’.

This passage uses the pronoun “myself”. “I will say to *myself*”. But the Greek word that is used here is “soul”. So, in the parable, the rich man actually says, “I will say to my *soul*”, ‘*Soul*, you have blessings in reserve for years to come’”. It was not some passing thought, that he had a long-life ahead of him, in which to enjoy himself with his wealth. This was the

state of his soul, which, being blinded by the love of pleasure, naively envisioned a long time into the future, although, he would not even see the next day. This shows us just how great was the disordered love of his soul for material things, particularly, eating and drinking.

Can we begin to see how truly foolish was this man?

He amassed all of this wealth, stored it up, and committed his soul to it. Even if his life had not been taken that night, even if the parable had him living to be 100 years old with all of his possession, his fate would have remained the same. *He gave his soul to what does not last, to what would certainly fail him.*

This is the true definition of a fool, that is, to sacrifice the greatest good, and that which is eternal, for material things and pleasures, which pass away. As our Lord has said, “What profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul in the process (Matthew 16:26).

If we live for worldly things, we will suffer the same fate as the rich man. Where we give our hearts, where we commit our soul, that is where we are going, that will be our final end. We become like that which we love, like the very thing to which we have given our soul.

The rich man in the parable, then, was concerned only with pleasure. And so, he fattens up his body, so to speak, and gives it all sorts of comforts and care, but keeps his soul lean on a diet of neglect. If he cared for his soul, he would raise his thoughts to what is above. He would strive for what endures, for what is eternal. Our holy father St. Basil the Great, as if speaking to the rich man in the parable, says:

Because you are altogether carnal and subject to the passions, you speak from your belly, and not from your soul.¹

¹St. Basil the Great, *Catena*, vol. 3 (Oxford: 1843), 444.

² St. John Chrysostom, *ibid.*

The pursuit of pleasure, darkens the mind and weakens the will. But it also puts a burden on our bodies.² And so, it often ruins our health. St. John Chrysostom says:

For not to the soul alone are pleasures hurtful, but to the body itself, because from being a strong body it becomes weak, from being healthy— diseased, from being active—slothful...³

The worst part of all this, however, is the judgment that befalls the rich man. Again, St. Basil says of him, “While he speaks in secret, his words are weighed in heaven, from where a reply comes”⁴, “You fool, this night your soul is required of you”. And so, our Lord says of the parable of the rich man, “That is the way it works with the man who grows rich for himself instead of growing rich in the sight of God”.

³ St. John Chrysostom, *ibid.*

⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Catena*, vol. 3 (Oxford: 1843), 445.

We must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of pleasure-seeking, and pursuing a life of ease, which is so prevalent in our society. But instead, be moderate in our enjoyment of what God has given us, keeping ever before the eyes of soul that none of it is really ours. Whatever we might have, will soon be taken away from us, even our breath. The things of earth are not our possessions, and our life here is not our own.

Our true wealth, and life, what we really possess as our own, is what we store up heaven. Our Lord says:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt 6:19–21.)

We truly possess this heavenly treasure as our own, in Christ Jesus, because it cannot be taken away from us against our will. St. Paul says:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? [...] For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35, 38-39).

So, how do we lay up such treasures in heaven? We do this in many ways. We store up treasure in heaven by the right use of material goods, for good works. But if we hold such things for ourselves alone, for our own pleasure-seeking and comfort, then such things become for us like stagnant water that makes us ill. But if we use material things for good works, done for the love of God and neighbor, then, such things

become like a flowing fountain of life-giving water, that sustains and refreshes our soul. Such generosity, however, is not merely about the use of material things, but the self-sacrifice that we make of ourselves to care for others.⁵

We also store up treasures in heaven by the worship of God, by meditation on the Holy Scriptures, and putting the Word of God into practice. We store up treasures in heaven by the practice of the virtues, and by the right reception of the Holy Mysteries. It is particularly important to have the right disposition of heart and soul when we receive our Lord's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. We must always remember that Jesus truly lives in us, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no greater treasure than this if we open our soul to the Holy Trinity.

⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Catena*, vol. 3 (Oxford: 1843), 443–444.

St. Ambrose sums all of this up, when he says,

For in vain he amasses wealth who knows not how to use it. Neither are these things ours which we cannot take away with us. Virtue alone is the companion of the dead, mercy alone follows us, which gains for the dead an everlasting [home] habitation.⁶

So, let us store up treasure in heaven by the right use of materials things and by living virtuous lives. Let us not be caught up in ourselves, like stagnant water, but be like a living fountain and use what we have, and live our lives, for good works done for the love of God and neighbor. Let us not waste our lives by giving ourselves over to material things, and thus, to vice, but strive to become virtuous. These are the true possessions of our soul, the treasures stored up in heaven. This is to be rich in the sight of God. Those who live such lives

⁶ St. Ambrose of Milan, *Catena*, vol. 3 (Oxford: 1843), 445–446.

are truly rich and truly possess their riches. These riches last forever and cannot be taken away from us.

Let us turn to our blessed Lady, and ask her to intercede for us, that we would live for what is above, as she did, and one day enter eternity, and enjoy the treasures stored up for us in heaven, together with our Lady, and all the angels and saints.

O Most Holy Theotokos, pray for us!