My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Summer is coming to an end. Autumn is fast approaching, as can be witnessed by the trees as they are starting to color their leaves in their lovely autumn beauty.

Matthew 19: 16-26
And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?
And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.
He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,
Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?
Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.
But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.
Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.
And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.
When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?
But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

We see a young man approach the Savior and ask the following question: Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? Do we ever ourselves ask God this most significant question? Why do I call it a significant question? Because the reason we have been given life here on earth is to demonstrate to God whether or not we want eternal life. Do we or do we not want salvation? God has given us earthly life to allow us to make this choice, a choice which is for eternity. Shouldn’t then this be the major concern for us in our lives?

The Savior’s answer to the man’s question is the expected answer: if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. There is no surprise in His answer. He repeatedly instructed His disciples, and through them, us, that in order to love Him, we must obey His commandments. We cannot truly love God and not obey His commandments.

The young man’s follow-up question is equally significant. He asked: Which? This too is significant because it confirms to us that in order to obey God’s commandments, we need to know what they are. This fact is very important to all of us, because without this knowledge, we cannot be saved. We are unable to live a God-pleasing life if we do not know how to please God.

The Savior, from the very beginning of His mission, began to teach people how to live correctly. He chose His apostles to aid Him in this monumental task in order to reach all of humanity. This mission to teach people has been continued throughout history by Christ’s Church.
The Lord also gave this mission to the parents of children. They will have to answer to God on judgment day as to how well they performed this mission. Therefore, dear parents, remember that you cannot give your children what you yourself don’t have. You need to learn God’s teachings yourself before you are able to teach them to your children.

The Savior identifies what His salvific commandments are, to which the young man responds with an unexpected assertion: *All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?* He claimed to have obeyed all the commandments from his youth forward and yet felt that he was lacking something, which reveals to us a profound truth. It is not enough to simply obey the commandments. That alone does not save a person. What then is lacking? Why is obedience to God’s commandments alone not sufficient to achieve salvation?

The answer is found in a correct understanding of what the commandments are designed to accomplish. They are not meant to be the means to salvation. They are simply tools that we use to change ourselves from sinful creatures into god-like beings. If all we do is eternally obey the commandments, but do not let them change us internally, we are not accomplishing what we are meant to accomplish through our use of them. We are simply wasting our time and effort.

This critical fact can be seen when we see how the young man reacted to what the Savior was teaching him. *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.* He claimed that he had faithfully obeyed God’s commandments. His attachment to his wealth, however, revealed that despite his keeping the commandments, they did not change him. Sin still was deeply embedded in his heart and ruled over him in his life. In fact, he did not keep all the commandments as he believed. He worshiped a false god, his wealth, in defiance of the Second Commandment.

When we realize how profoundly hard it is to correctly keep God’s commandments and allow them to willingly change us to become god-like, we probably will have the same reaction of desperation that the apostles had. *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?* The truth is that we, by ourselves, cannot achieve salvation. But we are comforted by the Savior’s response: *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

What is God telling us? He is telling us that people are enslaved by their sins and cannot free themselves without His help. He was born, lived, died, and resurrected in order to make available to people the power that they need to have and use in their keeping of the commandments. People need Divine Grace. If they use it in their lives, they will have the ability to overcome their sins and nurture piety in their hearts. As Christ stated: *Without Me, you can do nothing.*

My dear brothers and sisters, our Lord really wants to save everyone. But He cannot do it by Himself. We want to be saved, but we, also, cannot do it by ourselves. We need to work with God and use His divine Grace that He freely offers to us. Working together with our Savior will empower us to accomplish what we need to do to allow Him to accept us into His eternal blessed kingdom that He is prepared to share with those who love Him. Therefore, let us demonstrate through the way that we now live, together with Him, that we love Him. A most blessed eternity is ours if we do.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar