



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

Next Services

**Saturday, February 2nd
Feast of the Presentation of
our Lord to the Temple**

Matins

8:45 am

and

Divine Liturgy

10:00 am

Great Vespers

5:00 pm

**Fr. Peter is available to hear
confessions before Vespers by
appointment.**

Sunday, February 3rd

Matins

8:45 am

Divine Liturgy

10:00 am

Fellowship to follow

at

St. Olympia Chapel

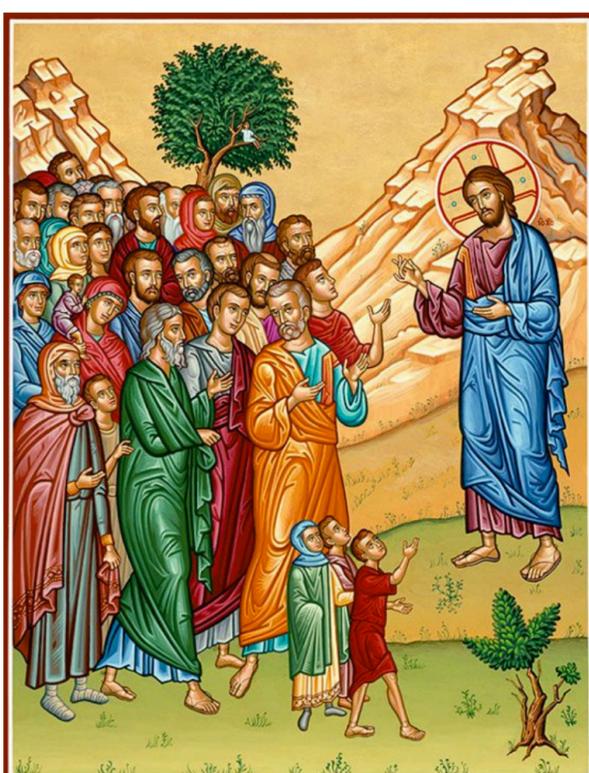
123 Main Street

Potsdam, NY, 13676

House Blessings

This includes apartments, offices, dorm rooms, nursing homes...

Fr. Peter will continue to bless homes throughout the North Country.
Phone or email him to schedule his visit.



Welcome Back and Congratulations

Zachary Price successfully completed his student teaching in December in the Syracuse area. He was offered and accepted a teaching position in the Lisbon Central School District, and has now embarked on his music teaching career. It is wonderful to have him return to our parish family, a delight to have him back in the choir and, of course, we are very pleased and proud of his achievements. God grant you many years, Zach!

Luke 18:18-27

*Note: the following article was written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

In his book *Don't Waste Your Life*, John Piper writes: "I will tell you what a tragedy is. Consider a story from Reader's Digest about a couple who 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.' Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my shells.'" Piper ends it with this: "People today are spending billions of dollars to embrace that tragic dream. Over and against that, I put my protest: Don't buy it. Don't waste your life."

And that, in a nutshell is what the Lord Jesus is telling us in Luke 18:18-27: don't waste your life. Now, most of us have trouble applying this Gospel to ourselves. We don't consider ourselves rich, like the young man in the Gospel. Of course, compared to the vast majority of folks in the world today, we in this country are materially rich indeed. But none of us has to be rich in order to covet or idolize money, possessions, and/or anything else we put in the place in our lives, the central and controlling place, which belongs to God alone. It's not the amount of wealth we actually have, but our desire, our hunger, for wealth, and in general the things of this passing world, that starves our souls. And our culture encourages this kind of love for wealth. The root of the word "culture" is the Latin word "cultus," which means "a system of religious worship." And it's obvious just from TV commercials that the culture we live in worships wealth, worldliness, and the pursuit of them. It's the wealthy 1%, who are our society's gods; and it is not God's Word, but their word which our world heeds.

So how are we to respond to the radical message in our Gospel: "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me"? Well, we can---like the rich young ruler---walk away from Christ and from Christian faith, because we'd rather be people of great wealth or at least people who desire great wealth, than be followers of Jesus Christ who embrace being "the poor in spirit." Oh, not that we'd leave the parish or abandon the outward rituals of our faith. No; it's in our hearts, our priorities in what's really important to us and on which we spend the coin of our lives: it's there we'd turn our backs on Jesus and walk away.

Or we can try to deflect this challenge onto the select few: monastics, who are by definition committed to voluntary poverty and non-acquisitiveness, chastity, obedience, and conversion of life. But is that it? Can every other Christian not called to monastic life breathe a sigh of relief and keep on seeking profit, wealth, and worldly things because "Hey, it doesn't apply to me"? Or does Jesus address this message to every follower of His, challenging us to take Him at His word and really trust that "What is impossible for people is possible with God"?

One author nails it when he writes, "The Christian life comes, not by gritting our teeth, but by falling in love." Think back to Luke 4:18-19 where, quoting the prophet Isaiah, the Lord Jesus tells us clearly that His ministry---and ours---is about God's love in action: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And responding to that ministry is ultimately all about falling in love with the One Who loves us that much.

That's the context in which we find this rich young ruler running up to Jesus and asking "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus immediately calls him on his flattery: "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. So do you really recognize Me as 'Immanuel, which is translated God-with-us,' or are you just blowing smoke?" Then Jesus digs deeper, to see if the trust-fund kid is serious enough in his question to be practicing the basics of his faith: "You know the commandments. So, are you keeping them?" It's when the boy claims, "All these things I have kept from my youth," that Jesus zeros in the boy's real issue: "OK. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Now, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this event; but only Mark 10:21 adds the detail that "Jesus, looking at him, loved him." Get it? Jesus is not calling the man to some kind of punishment or judgment. Out of love Jesus is inviting the man to free himself from, in this case, the wealth that binds him, imprisons him and keeps him from what his heart truly desires, namely, a living and loving relationship with God and people. Jesus is speaking the hard truth that his money is in the way of what he really wants; that his possessions are obstacles to eternal life; that his wealth is in the way of him falling, head over heels, in love with the God Who loves him. And it's the hard truth that in order to achieve what he really desires, he has to disappoint his parents' expectations and reject what his class and culture (very like our own) define as being "successful:" having big bucks.

Can you relate? I can. Some years ago my late mother told me that despite my excellent education, because as a priest and monastic I was not making \$100,000.00 a year, she considered me a failure. Of course it was kind of cute that in the age of .com billionaires she still thought \$100K was a huge salary. And I knew that because she had not been allowed to go to high school and had suffered poverty during the Great Depression, she considered a good education and a high salary to be crucially important to living a good life. But I was still a bit hurt, and quite sad at how she didn't realize that it's only when we let loose our grip on materialism and on pleasure, power, self-importance, ego, being "right," and all the other things we worship and give our lives to instead of God, and instead allow ourselves to fall in love with God and our neighbor---ah, it's only then that we come really to life; that we enter the life of the Kingdom of God; and that once we do, we wouldn't have it any other way.

If we look around us, we cannot but be anguished at the poverty we see. And if we're at all in tune with the Gospel of Him Who is "anointed to preach the good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed," we cannot miss the connection between empty stomachs on one side of town and empty lives on the other side, and the challenge those empty stomachs make to our own priorities, commitments, and spending habits. Each follower of Jesus faces the fact that to serve money, to serve self, is to turn away from God. To serve God is to reject the accumulation of wealth and become recipients of a totally unmerited love, a love that enables us to let go of anything to which we are captive, and follow Christ.

The key is letting the love of God so take hold of us anything other than loving God by loving other people finally starts to turn our stomachs and break our hearts. In our affluent "culture" it's easy to forget what Christianity is really about: that we stand out from among the other people by proclaiming that a young Jewish Rabbi Who'd been executed in Jerusalem was and is the Son of God; that through faith and baptism we have already died to sin with Christ and have risen with Him to a new and eternal life; that Jesus is now our life; and that to live is to live for the glory of God, not of ourselves, because to live for self is to put self at the center of things, where God alone belongs. We think it important to know who we are. But it's far more important to know and ever be mindful of Whose we are. In Holy Baptism we are signed on our foreheads with the sign of the Cross to express that now we belong to Him and that He both calls and empowers us to follow Him; to live for the Son of God Who loves us and gave Himself for us; to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

And that involves uprooting from our lives whatever is standing in the way of following Him. For the young man in our Gospel, his money was causing him to walk away from Jesus Christ. Watching him go, Jesus said: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." And the point is that as, our Lord tells us in Matthew 6:24, it's impossible to serve two masters; "for [we] will hate the one and love the other, or else [we] will be loyal to one and despise the other. [We] cannot serve God and riches." To what are you and I clinging that may well keep us out of the Kingdom of God? And are we now willing, always and only by the help of God's grace, to let go of it for the sake of Christ? It's your choice...and mine too.