

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (16: 19-31; Gal. 6:11-18)

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of The Holy Spirit +

Had the rich man paid attention to Abraham while he was alive then maybe he would have followed Abraham's example. Abraham was rich. He had flocks given to him by Pharaoh, nevertheless he was humble. He had all of Canaan before him, but so that there would be peace between him and his younger nephew, Lot, Abraham allowed Lot to divide the land between them. Abraham was blessed and fed by the priest of the most High God, Melchizedek, and still Abraham gave that holy priest a tithe, a tenth, of everything he had. And when the LORD appeared to Abraham, the Patriarch bowed down to the ground, and hospitably provided a feast. This is called the "Hospitality of Abraham" and is an icon of our salvation. The rich man did none of these things; he paid no attention to Abraham, and did not imitate humility, peace, tithing and charity, and hospitality.

But in one moment death supplanted the worldly honor of the rich man, just as surely as it supplanted the worldly dishonor of Lazarus. And here we come to the crux of the matter: death. They both die. They're dead.<sup>i</sup> They aren't disincarnate souls in Heaven. They aren't playing the harp on puffy clouds. They're dead. They can't sing alleluia. They can't praise God.

They're dead in Sheol, Hades, a spiritual "place" or "condition" or "state."<sup>ii</sup> Lazarus is at the top in the bosom of Abraham where the righteous dead awaited the resurrection. The rich man however is at the bottom, the pit, where the unrighteous waited to get what they had coming, so to speak.

And it's from the pit that the rich man calls out saying, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in torment." The rich man is in torment by his unsatisfying sin and evil, and it's too late. He had his chance, so Abraham says, "Son remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted and you are in torment."

"Then I beg you father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house and warn my five brothers, lest they also come into this place of torment." But Abraham said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

Now, if people don't follow the commandments of God then they will not believe even if one should be raised from the dead, namely Jesus Christ, because they have already been caught up by evil. And so they die. And so we die, however, it is that death which Christ entered into: our human death, our being abandoned by God and shut up in the tomb. And it's from the tomb that He saves us from the last enemy-death.

The cross and the grave of Christ are not about punishment. It is about finally having the real Adam, the real human, the only one who ever did God's will, the only one who is good, totally obey, totally trust, totally believe in God, and so destroy sin and death. So now our death doesn't have to silence our alleluia.

All are going to be raised, but being raised is not enough. We need to be raised to glory. This is why we must be united to Him, so our resurrection is one of glory and not condemnation. We have to destroy our being spiritually dead to God by faith in and union with the resurrected one. Otherwise, it's a resurrection of death.

Spiritually we need to die to the passions and this world. We need to put to death our ego, and our will, so that we can receive the risen Body of Christ, which we have already been baptized into; the robe of light that we have put on like a garment. And so when we die we can be further clothed with Christ. But until then, until He comes, we commune with Him in His broken Body and His spilled Blood, with faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

+ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of The Holy Spirit +

---

<sup>i</sup> What follows largely comes from Fr. Thomas Hopko's teaching and lecture "An Orthodox Understanding of Death."

<sup>ii</sup> I do not know how to describe Hades. Is this an actual place? A condition? Do we use the term "place" in an apophatic manner?