
Wealth, Love, Generosity and Reward

Basil's exegesis of the encounter of Jesus with the rich young man

Then someone came to Jesus and said "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him ... "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" ... the young man said to him, "I have kept all these from my youth." (Matt. 19:16-22)

If your claims were true, namely that you observed from your youth the commandment of love, according to each an equal portion with yourself, from where do you derive this abundance? The care of the needy is an expensive undertaking. Even if each receives only the little his need requires, nevertheless all distribute these goods even as they provide for themselves. Consequently, the one who loves his neighbour as himself possesses nothing in excess of his neighbour's. However, you obviously have many possessions ... Clearly your wealth and superabundance indicates a lack of charity ... If you had clothed the naked, if you had shared your bread with the hungry and opened the doors to strangers, if you had become a father for orphans, if you commiserated with all those in dire straits, what regrets would you have had about money in handing over what you have left, if you had long been concerned about distributing to the needy?¹

On planning to leave a generous will

You wait until you are no longer among men to become their friend? ... Great thanks for your generosity! And in fact, what can a dead person do? ... There is no place for piety once life is over ... You promise benefits with paper and ink, but who will announce your death? Who will pay for your funeral? ... The one who guards your hoard will dispose all according to his own interests, thwarting your wishes ... Even when [the will] is clearly co-signed and you have declared it in a clear voice, only one added letter is enough to undo all your wishes: one altered seal, two or three false witnesses, and, lo and behold, your whole estate is in other hands.²

On generosity

The glory that is born of good works you carry back to the Lord where, standing before our common Judge all the people shall call you their nourisher and their benefactor ... Do you not see those at the theatre, at the public contests, at the fights with beasts, those who scatter their wealth for the sake of applause from the common people around them, of those whose very appearance is abhorrent? And you are mean and grasping in spending the little by which you may attain to such endless glory?³

¹ Hom. 7.1 in S.R Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p.105

² Hom.7.8 in S.R Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p.105

³ Hom. 6.3 in S.R Holman, *The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p.107

“Why are you rich, this other man poor?”

When [wells] are in disuse they grow foul. And so do riches grow useless, left idle and unused in any place; but moved about and passing from one person to another, they serve the common advantage and bear fruit ... [Your grain] is not your own - but for common use of all. You were born naked. Why are you rich, this other man poor? Is it not solely that you may earn the rewards of compassion, of good and faithful administration, and that [the poor person] may be honoured with the glorious rewards of patience?⁴

On losing & finding wealth

When you make renouncement of the goods you possess, be adamant in your resolve, convinced that you are merely dispatching these goods to heaven in advance; for, although you are hiding them in the bosom of the lowly, you will find them again with God, greatly increased.⁵

⁴ *Hom. 6.5 & 6.7 in S.R Holman, The Hungry Are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p.107*

⁵ *On Renunciation of the World (Fathers of the Church, Vol. 9, p.18)*