

On Wealth and Poverty

by Saint John Chrysostom

Translated and Introduced by Catherine P. Roth

New York: Saint Vladimir Seminary Press, 1984

Softcover, 140 pages, \$15.00

Truly, good things come in small packages. This very edifying book contains an introduction and six chapters. The introduction consists of a brief biography of Saint John and commentary on the six chapters. Each chapter is one sermon in a succession of sermons on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:20-31) given by Saint John when he was a priest in Antioch.

The introduction provides a rather good synopsis of the themes of the sermons, as well as some insights into interesting aspects of life at the time that they were preached, 388-389 A.D. For instance, we find that Saint John was applauded (they hummed loudly!) during his sermons, that he took people to task for leaving with the catechumens after the sermon, and that he urged the people to read the Bible regularly. (Who says the Orthodox ignore the Bible? The Saint's sermons are replete with Biblical references!) He was truly loved by the people even though he was relentless in his pursuit of teaching them the true Christian life.

The fifth sermon is omitted because Saint John briefly mentions the parable at the beginning and then changes subjects. Also omitted are several passages from the other sermons, which the translator felt are not directly relevant to the issue of wealth and poverty. That the fifth sermon is not included is understandable; however, one wishes that the others had been presented in their entirety.

These sermons are a fountain of spiritual wealth and edification, a fountain, which to this day continues to pour forth indispensable guidance for the faithful. When one reads them, what becomes immediately obvious is that the Faith does not change. Today we are still faced with issues of wealth and poverty. The words of this great Father of our Faith continue to speak to us about spiritual wealth, and how poverty and suffering need to be viewed by the faithful. Indeed, we need only to consider the contemporary debate on assisted suicide to realize just how important, and timeless, these sermons really are.

It is not presumptuous to say that perhaps one of the most profound statements in the Gospels is found in this parable: "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will

they be persuaded even if one rose from the dead" (16:31). It all begins, and ends with faith, and Saint John reminds us constantly that "all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23), regardless of our status in life.

Through his life and words we see that Saint John truly believed in that other profound commandment of our Lord: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all things will be given unto you" (Matt 6:33). These sermons attest to that firsthand. This book ought to be in the library of all Orthodox faithful and regularly reread.

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